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WWF VP JIM ROSS ON McMAHON, BISCHOFF, HOGAN, AND MORE!

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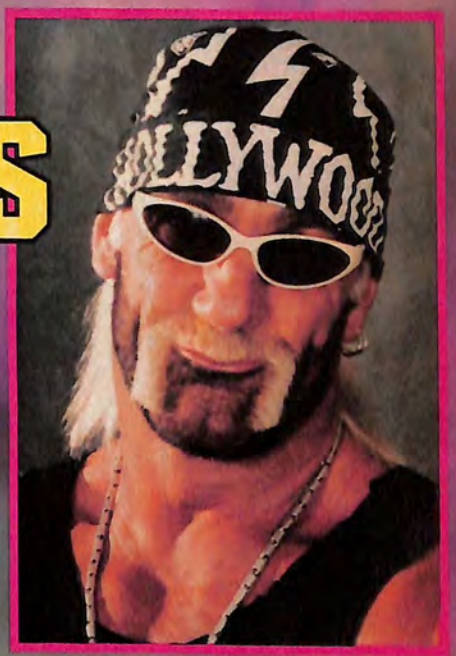
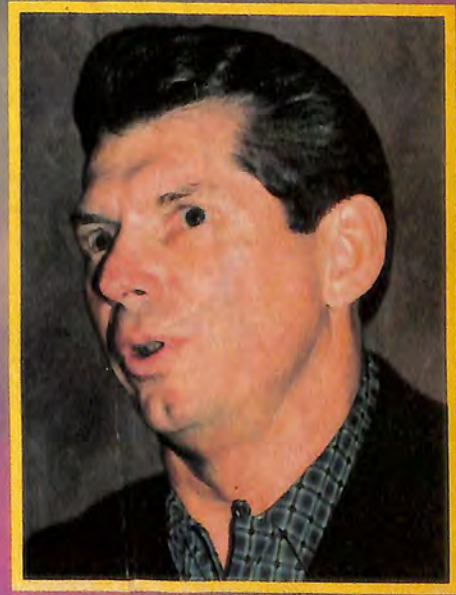
BRET SCREWS BRET, PART II



- He'll Never Get His Shot At Hogan
- He's Vindicated Vince
- He's Double-Crossed His Family
- He's At War With The Fans–Again



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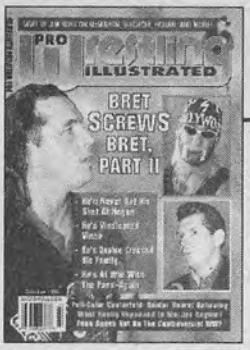

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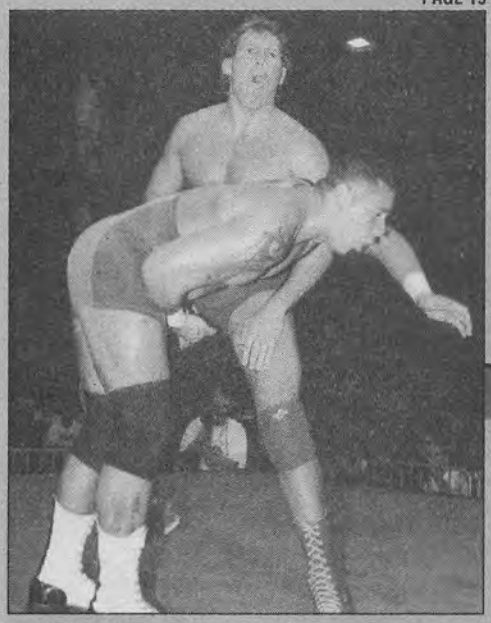

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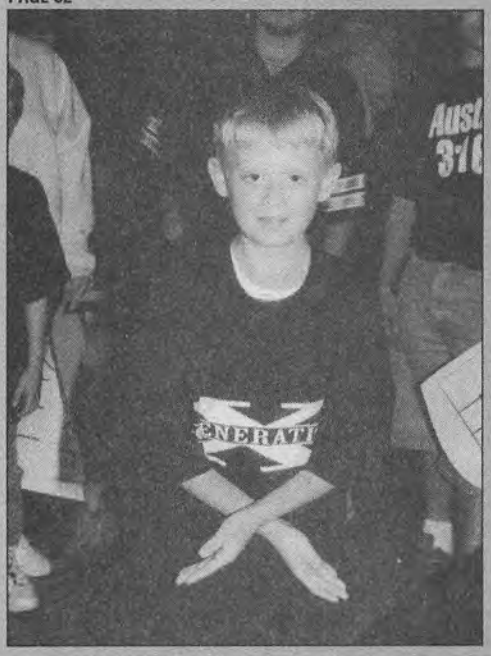

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Send letters to:
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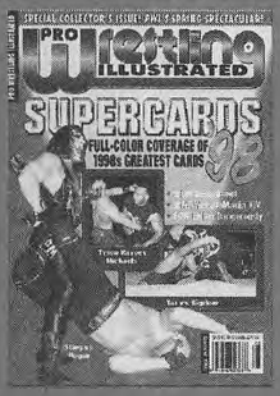
SUPER STUFF



The cover of the August 1998 issue featured peak action photographs from three of the best wrestling supercards so far in 1998: WCW's SuperBrawl, the WWF's WrestleMania, and ECW's Living Dangerously. Many of our readers look forward to our annual "Supercards" issue, and they had a lot to say about this one.

"Since there are so many pay-per-views, I have a hard time keeping track of them," wrote Karen Dewitt of Lakeland, Florida. "It's nice to have an issue like this so I can look back and get in-depth coverage of the best ones."

"I'm glad you picked those three pay-per-views, because they were all memorable to me," wrote John Trumbell of Chicago. "Another great issue."

At least one fan had a complaint, though.

"I think you guys made too much of a big deal about WrestleMania XIV," wrote Sam Allen of Tempe, Arizona. "I thought it was one of the weaker WrestleManias."

SO WHAT!

Enough is enough. I'm sick of hearing about Bill Goldberg. Who cares if he's 100-0? No wonder his record is so impressive. Look at his competition: Barry Darsow, Jerry Flynn, Brad Armstrong. Wow, these guys are really tough to beat. His toughest opponent to date has been Raven. Goldberg is nothing but a "Stone-Cold" wannabe. Put him in the ring with wrestlers like Bret Hart, Sting, and Hollywood Hogan. These guys would give him a wrestling lesson he'd never forget.

AMANDA RIDGELY
Myersville, MD

EXTREME AUSSIE

Tommy Dreamer is the most promising star in the sport today. He has great enthusiasm, and no one's competitive drive compares to his. Tommy possesses speed, strength, and a no-holds-barred brawling style, all while conducting himself with fairness and integrity—even in such a violent promotion as ECW.

Tommy is unique in that he is always loyal to his promotion, his friends, and his fans. I believe one day that Tommy will become champion because he definitely has all the tools necessary, but even without the belt, Tommy will be a champion.

TUPA TEUFFEL
Sydney, Australia

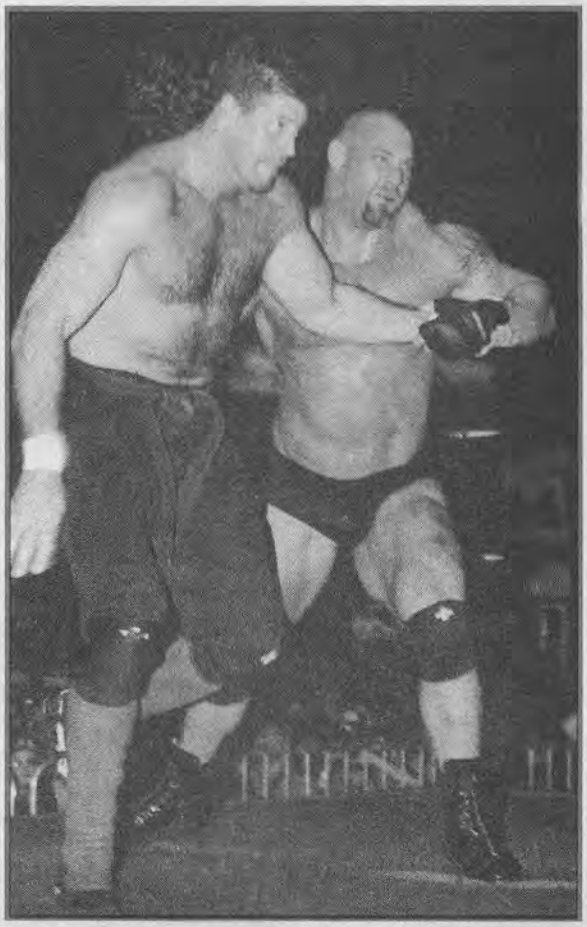
BAD BOY

I just read the July issue of *PWI*, and I strongly disagree with the comments of Courtney Farmer ("My Hero") in "Between Falls." Courtney, if you are reading this, yes, drinking and cursing do make Steve Austin a bad person. I'm sure God loves him, but He doesn't love his actions.

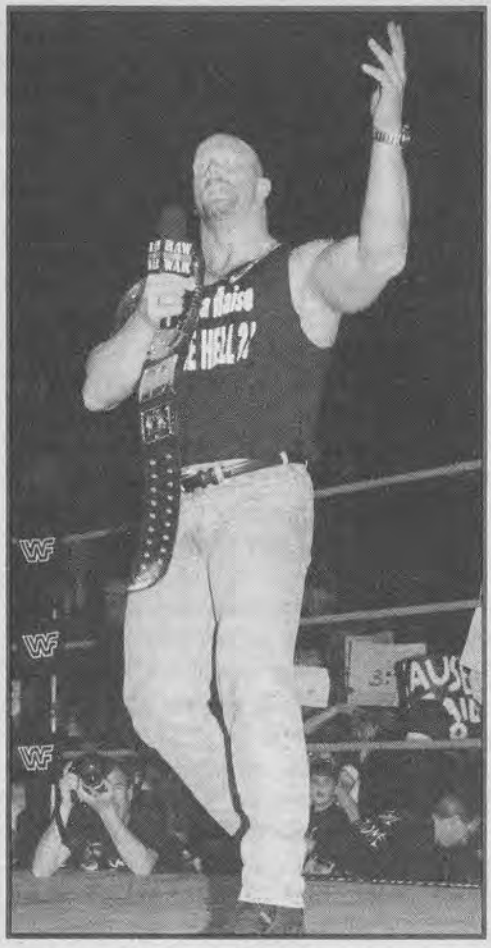
I have had migraine headaches in the past. I had to go to the hospital, and I was afraid to go into the "big machine," too. But I never got to the point where I looked at Steve Austin and "swallowed my fear."

Can Steve Austin help you by cursing and drinking? I don't think so.

TRAVIS BREWER
Round Lake, IL



Bill Goldberg whips Jerry Flynn into the ropes. The wrestling world is enamored with the new WCW U.S. champion, but reader Amanda Ridgely says Goldberg's name won't mean anything to her until he steps up his level of competition.



Some fans really go for "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin's rebel image. Others, like Travis Brewer, say the WWF World champ should be judged by his actions *and* his words.

Spike Dudley gets ready to bulldog Buh Buh Ray during a wild ECW match. Some readers, like hardcore fan Garrett Orban, have accused members of *PWI's* staff of being anti-ECW.

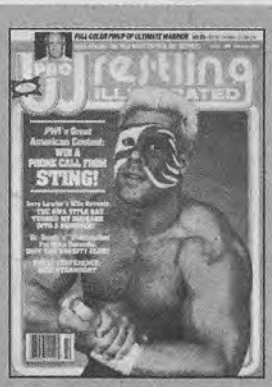
MORE ECW, PLEASE

I have been a loyal reader of this great magazine for over a decade and have found very few flaws. But I have found one now. I have been an avid, hardcore, diehard ECW fan for years, but it seems to me that some of your staff is secretly "anti-extreme." As we all know by now, ECW is a big-time place to be and has grown faster than any organization in the history of professional wrestling. Many *PWI* readers, including me, strongly suggest you start giving ECW the recognition it so rightfully deserves instead of showing such bias toward WCW and the WWF. Just because they both have more money to spend doesn't mean their products are better.

When was the last time an ECW wrestler has been on the cover of *PWI* by himself? Never! I have a great deal of respect for your magazine, but if this anti-

(Continued on page 50)

10 YEARS AGO IN PWI



The cover of the October 1988 issue was used to promote *PWI's* "Great American Contest," in which one lucky reader was to win a phone call from Sting! Wrestling fans were asked to tell us in a 50-word essay why it was so important that they speak with Sting, who was fresh off his draw with NWA World champ Ric Flair at Clash of the Champions. A bonafide fan favorite, the "Stinger" only endeared himself further to his fans by making himself so accessible through this contest. Needless to say, our offices were flooded with entries.

Elsewhere in the magazine: The centerfold featured The Ultimate Warrior ... Dismayed by Mike Rotundo's association with Kevin Sullivan, "Dr. Death" Steve Williams warned his former friend to quit The Varsity Club ... Rick Steamboat chatted about his recent retirement in "Press Conference" ... Jerry "The King" Lawler's wife, Paula, revealed, "The AWA has turned my husband into a monster!"

Magazine availability: Sold out.

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RINGSIDE

With Bill Apter

THE MATCH EVERYONE wants to see—**Eric Bischoff** vs. **Vince McMahon**—might very well take place *someday*, but, according to McMahon, if it does happen, you won't get to see it! Responding to Bischoff's challenge to fight him at WCW Slamboree, McMahon had the following to say on the WWF's website a few days before the event:

"I consider Eric Bischoff's challenge a cheap and desperate tactic to increase WCW PPV buys. I will not do anything to help WCW increase their PPV buys. Therefore, I will not appear at Turner's next PPV as invited. However, if Mr. Bischoff is hellbent on fighting me, then such a fight can be arranged at any time, in any parking lot in the country, void of television cameras, photographers, and public announcement."

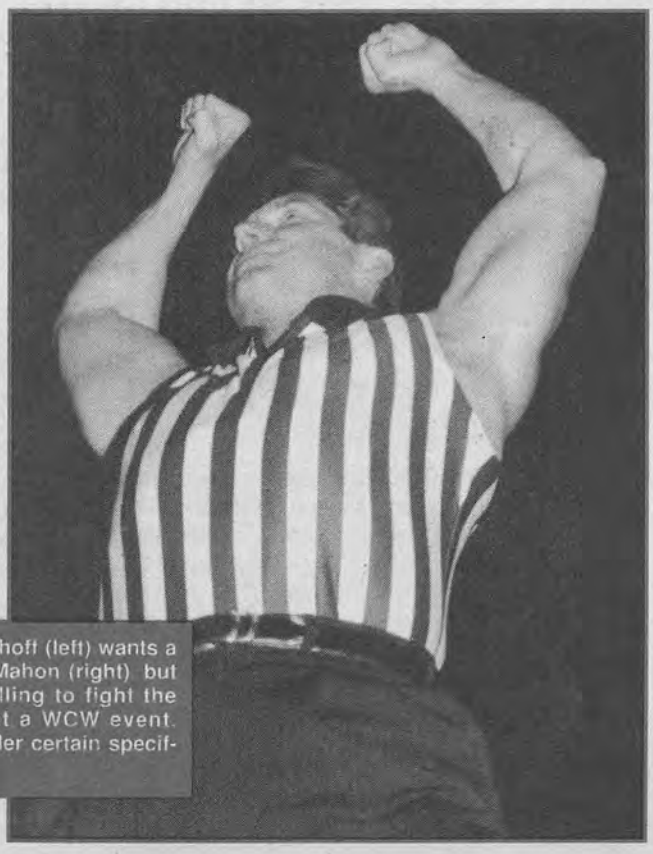
Since McMahon didn't show up at Slamboree, Bischoff had the fans count to 10 and declared himself the winner by forfeit.

So, who would really win such a match? I didn't bother asking any of the WWF or WCW wrestlers, since chances are they'd pick the heads of their respective companies, but I did poll three former world champions, all of whom are familiar with both Bischoff and McMahon.

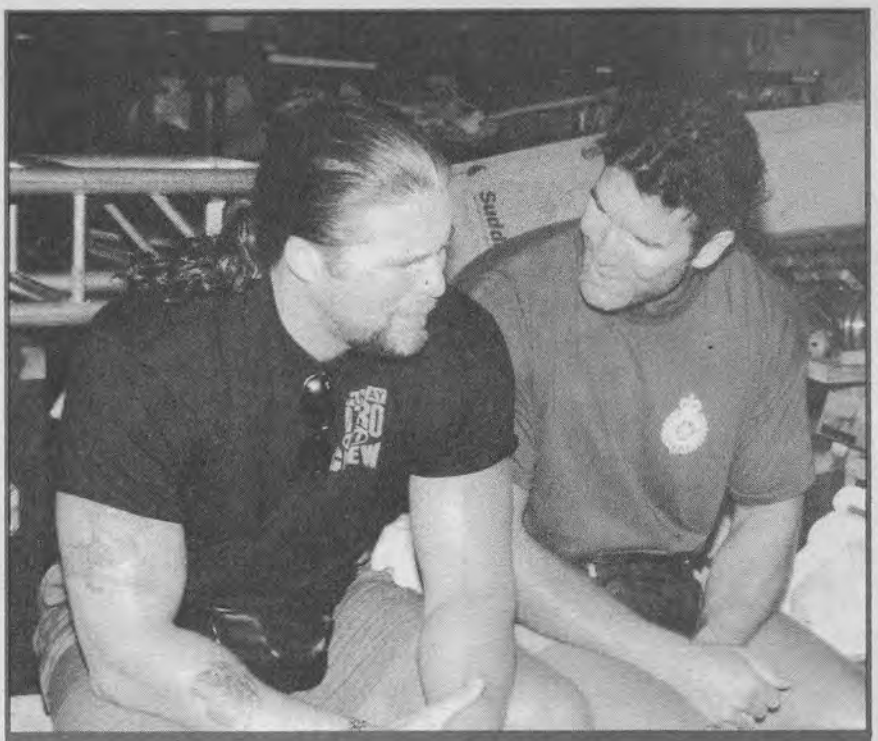
Harley Race: "McMahon would win. Bischoff may be the better-trained fighter, but McMahon is by far the stronger of the two, and I think he'd use that strength to overpower Bischoff."

Antonio Inoki: "Eric Bischoff would win due to his martial arts background. As I have learned, if you have the proper martial arts training, you can defeat a man who uses any other form of combat."

Nick Bockwinkel: "There are two schools of thought present here. The first one is that the two of them should leave the wrestling to the wrestlers and do what they both do best, which is running their respective companies. But if I have to pick a winner, I'll do it this way: If Vince McMahon gets kicked in the face with one of Bischoff's savate kicks, it's all over for him. On the other hand, since Vince is an unknown



We know Eric Bischoff (left) wants a piece of Vince McMahon (right), but McMahon isn't willing to fight the WCW president at a WCW event. He'll only do it under certain specific conditions.



For years, Kevin Nash and Scott Hall were the closest of friends. Now they're on opposite sides and on the verge of a major feud. Or are they?

commodity in the ring, I wouldn't be surprised if he used a maneuver that Bischoff wouldn't be at all ready for. If he did that, McMahon could put Bischoff down for the count very early. Of course, you'd have to find an arena large enough to fit both of their massive egos!"

Kevin Nash sustained a mild concussion when his tag team partner, **Scott Hall**, smashed him in the head with one of the WCW World tag team belts at Slamboree. Thanks to Hall's actions, he and Nash lost the tag team title to **Sting** and **The Giant**. Nash is still having a hard time believing that Hall did such a thing, but so far he has refused to sign a contract to wrestle him.

WCW Executive Committee Chairman **J.J. Dillon**, feeling this would be a natural box office attraction, tried to sign the match shortly after Slamboree, but he found two unwilling combatants.

"When I approached Nash, he just laughed at me and told me to get lost," Dillon reported. "Then when I talked to Hall about wrestling Nash, he just smiled, shrugged, and threw the contract down. For two guys who are supposed hate each other ... well, it was just strange."

Sources close to both Nash and Hall say they wouldn't be surprised to see the two men back on the same side again very soon.

"The worst time of both of their lives was when they feuded in the WWF," one source, who requested anonymity, told me. "They were both miserable, and I think they're miserable without each other now."

With ECW heavyweight champion **Shane Douglas** again sidelined with a badly injured right elbow (he probably won't be able to compete until at least the fall), **Taz** is trying to get federation officials to strip him of his title.

"I held the TV title for nine months, and I was always reminded me that if I couldn't defend the belt within a 30-day time period, it would be taken away from me," he

Taz has beaten Shane Douglas many times and thinks he could beat him for the ECW title now. Unfortunately, an elbow injury is keeping "The Franchise" out of action. And ECW officials have no plans to strip Douglas of the title.

Devon Storm (shown against Derek Domino) recently graduated from college with a degree in physical therapy. He'd like to work as a physical therapist in the WWF *and* wrestle there as well.

pointed out. "What the hell is the deal with Douglas? Why does he get special privileges?"

Responded ECW head **Paul E. Dangerously:** "This is no slight to Taz, but we never set up a 30-day defense provision for that belt. Shane Douglas remains champ."

Raven has always had an uncanny ability to control the minds of other wrestlers. We've all seen the power he has over members of his **Flock**. Remember also that **Stevie Richards** claims he was victimized for years when he and Raven were in ECW (and briefly WCW) together. Those two no longer keep in touch, but Richards still has psychological scars remaining from that relationship.

Now, however, it's looking like **Perry Saturn** will be the first man to actually break away from Raven unscathed.

"I truly believe I am in control of him, and that's the first time anyone has done that," Saturn says. "I can't tell you that I won't befriend him again, but he will certainly never control me again."

Congratulations to **Devon Storm**, who graduated from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in May with a bachelor's degree in physical therapy. Storm hopes his degree will help land him a dual position in the World Wrestling Federation as a wrestler/physical therapist ... **"Iron" Mike Samson** and **"Samurai" Mike Laturna**—a tag team known as **The Outfit**—have won the Windy City tag team belts from **Bad Influence**.

Dory Funk Jr., who has worked with many of the WWF's young wrestlers in his "dojo" training camps, proudly reports that the 7'4" WWF giant (unnamed at press time) is learning very quickly. "I'll show him a move," Funk said, "and before I know it, he's got it down almost perfectly. He's anxious to keep learning, which makes my job a lot easier. If he keeps learning at this pace, I predict a tremendous future for him."

APW wrestler **"Gigolo" Vinny Massaro** brags that it took him only a little more than 15 minutes to dispose of 12 other "world-class wrestlers" to win a battle royal and take home a $2,000 prize. Massaro ousted **Frank Murdoch** to win that large bundle of cash. "I guess the talent scouts for WWF and WCW will be knocking on my door real soon," he said.

That's all for now. I'll see you at ringside! □

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FROM THE DESK OF...

Stuart M. Saks

WOO. WHAT A name for a movie! No, it doesn't star Ric Flair and it has nothing to do with wrestling. With the reviews this flick's been receiving (my newspaper gave it a whopping one-star rating), maybe they would have been better off making a movie about the most colorful champion in the history of this great sport.

Woo. The story of professional wrestler Ric Flair, the man who chopped and strutted his way into the hearts of everyone only to be sued by his employer for taking some time off to see his son compete in the most important wrestling match of his life. (Okay, that's a rather one-sided view of Flair's legal struggle with WCW, but it is his movie after all!).

Wrestling is chockfull of intriguing stories like *Woo.* Like ...

The Big Lebowski (altered for my purposes to *The Pretty Big Szatkowski*). Rob Van Dam portrays himself in the story of a kickboxer who finds success in the professional wrestling ranks after adding 25 percent to his body mass, but still can't erase the press' notion that he's undersized. Soon, he's driven to the verge of insanity by wrestling magazines, who can't seem to stop printing four-year-old photos of him as a mere 227-pounder.

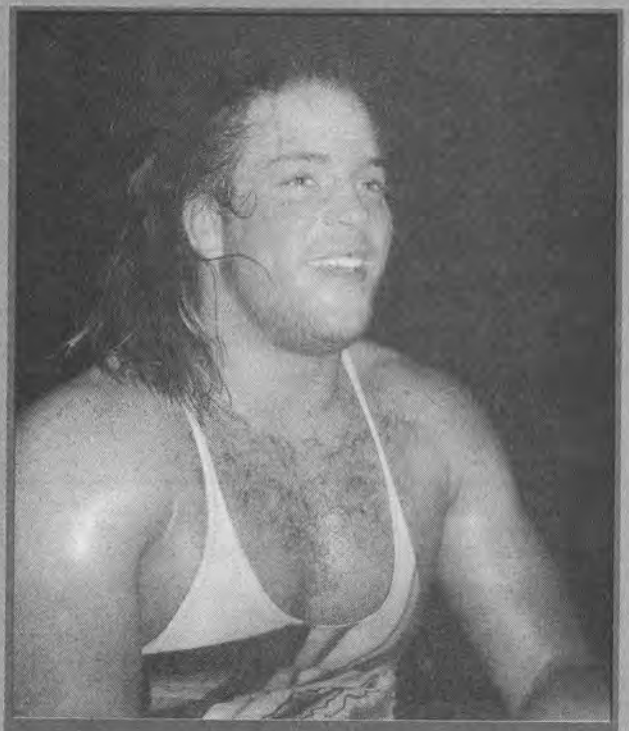
As Good As It Gets. As the war between WCW and WWF heats up yet again, the rival promotions are actually adding to each other's audiences, checking each other out during live Monday night broadcasts, and responding to each other's criticisms on the air. The movie focuses on one record-breaking Nielsen family that can actually flip back and forth so quickly during the two shows that they register simultaneous ratings points for each.

Deja Vu. Starved for love and receiving nothing but contempt, professional wrestler Bret Hart, for the second time in a little more than a year, lashes out at the fans. Viewers will be sitting on the edge of their seats wondering if the "Hitman" is going to punch out Eric Bischoff and then try to find love in the hearts of ECW fans (an oxymoron if there ever was one) in the sequel.

Didn't Do It For Love. Mick Foley was never really sure which of his three pro wrestling personae suited him best. If he couldn't live with himself the day after spending a night as Dude Love, how would be able to handle being WWF owner Vince McMahon's company boy? Maybe, just maybe, he's playing a fourth character. Maybe he has some plans for Mr. McMahon that even *he* doesn't consciously know about. This is a four-star movie, if you apply one each for Foley, Dude Love, Cactus Jack, and Mankind.

Les Miserables. How can you make more money than 99.9 percent of your co-workers and still be unhappy at your job? Tom Selleck plays pro wrestler Scott Hall and Gheorghe Muresan plays Kevin Nash in this stirring tale of unrest in the workplace and how their smug boss, Eric Bischoff, played by Pierce Brosnan, unleashes his frustrations by sending their best friend "Pac-ing."

Lost In Space. Can man communicate with an inanimate object? No? Well, how then does one explain how professional wrestler Al Snow is

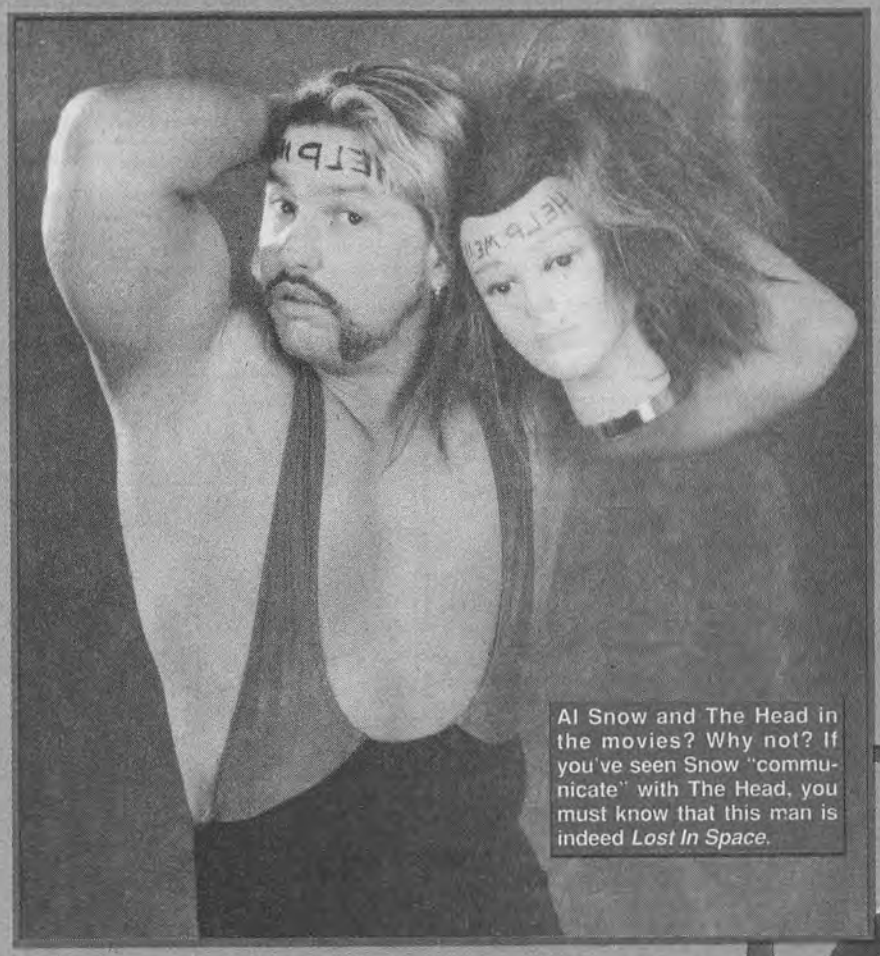


Rob Van Dam has appeared in a few movies already, but Stu Saks thinks he'd be perfect for the lead in *The Pretty Big Szatkowski.*

able to turn around a stagnant career after developing a close personal relationship with a detached mannequin head. "She's smart and she always gives me good advice," insists Snow. This harmless fantasy turns into a four-hanky tearjerker, however, when Head and Snow's best friend, Kneecap, have an affair, leaving Al a broken man.

Paulie (or *Paul E.*). He had the guts to blaze new trails, running a wrestling promotion that dared to be original. But as Paul E. Dangerously's Extreme Championship Wrestling began to gain a huge cult following, the Big Boys said, *"Hmmm*, there's something worth stealing here." So Big Boy to the South stole many of his wrestlers and Big Boy to the North had the gall to steal his extreme attitude. Paul E. still has his growing pay-per-view universe, but can he cope with the thought that new fans might be confused and think *he's* the ripoff artist? Extreme violence, extreme language, not for everyone.

Titanic. This high-budget film, chronicling the unprecedented growth of TitanSports' WWF from a highly successful yet regional professional wrestling promotion to a worldwide sports and entertainment force had to be re-shot as it neared completion. The original script described the demise of the WWF as the deep-pocketed Time Warner-owned WCW took over as the top promotion in the land. Then, suddenly, Titan lawyers demanded a change in the starring role to one Vincent K. McMahon Jr. And, just as suddenly, the WCW iceberg that had been in Titan's path melted, the danger of sinking passed, and McMahon, who in his heyday described himself as the "Walt Disney Of Wrestling," was threatening to reclaim what was once his. Please note rating change, from PG-13 to R.



Al Snow and The Head in the movies? Why not? If you've seen Snow "communicate" with The Head, you must know that this man is indeed *Lost In Space.*

* * *

And, speaking about the WWF, we are very pleased to break format this issue and present a 12-page "Press Conference" interview with WWF Senior Vice President of Talent Relations and Wrestling Administration Jim Ross. Long, fancy title, but what it really boils down to is Jim Ross is number three in the company, behind only Vince and Linda McMahon.

Ross had so much good stuff to say in his one-on-one interview with Associate Editor Frank Krewda, we just couldn't bear to chop it down to our normal "Press Conference" length. As a result, for this issue, we eliminated "Arena Reports" and "Media Daze" (though we did include the Monday Night Nielsen analysis as a sidebar to the interview).

I'm sure you'll read with great interest Ross' views on Vince, Eric Bischoff, the risque WWF style, and the future of the federation. Our regular departments will return next issue. □

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May 1987: Hulk vs. Andre? The WWF Braces For All-Out War! Centerfold: Steve Williams. Plus: Capt. Lou Albano, *PWI*/UWF Tourney, Jim Cornette, Dynamite Kid, Kerry Von Erich.

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November 1987: When The Going Gets Tough ... Will Nikita Koloff Turn Bad Again? Centerfold: George Steele. Plus: Road Warriors, Hulk Hogan, Jimmy Hart, Barry Windham.

June 1988: Is The End Near For Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: Tully Blanchard. Plus: Midnight Rockers-Kelly & Kiniski, Al Perez, Dusty Rhodes, Magnificent Muraco.

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November 1988: He's Back! But Is Savage's Belt Beyond Hulk's Reach? Centerfold: Midnight Express. Plus: Madusa-Hyatt, Rock 'n' Rolls, Dusty Rhodes, Warlord & Barbarian-Ax & Smash, Kevin Von Erich & Jessica McClure.

December 1988: The Four Horsemen's Revolving Door—Who's The Next To Go? Centerfold: Hacksaw Duggan. Plus: Jerry Lawler, Precious, Bam Bam Bigelow, Bruiser Brody, Intercontinental tag title.

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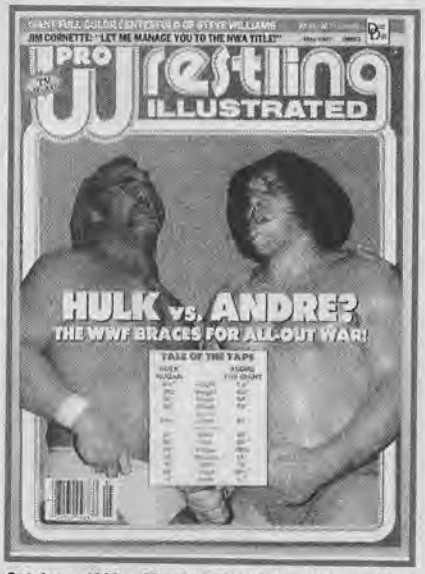

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April 1990: *PWI* Wrestler Of The Decade: Why Lex Luger Couldn't Ruin Ric Flair's Greatest Day. Centerfold: Dusty Rhodes. Plus: Rockers, Hogan-Hennig, Jerry Lawler.

May 1990: Hulk Hogan: Primed And Ready For WrestleMania VI. Centerfold: Great Muta. Plus: Piper-Rude, Eric Embry, Rock 'n' Rolls, Sid Vicious, pain.

June 1990: Hogan vs. Warrior: Why WrestleMania VI Won't Settle This Feud. Centerfold: Sting. Plus: Nikita Koloff, Cornette-Rock 'n' Rolls, Rhodes-Savage, Anderson-Sawyer, boxers vs. wrestlers.

July 1990: The Maturing Of Lex Luger: The "Total Package" Becomes The People's Choice. Centerfold: Rick Martel. Plus: Skyscrapers, Bobby Heenan, Mr. Saito, referees.

September 1990: The Hulkster's Wrath: 7,000 Miles To Violent Redemption. Centerfold: The Steiners. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Sting, Destruction Crew, Four Horsemen, Curt Hennig.

October 1990: Sting's Painful Lesson: You'll Have No Friends At The Top. Centerfold: Brutus Beefcake. Plus: Orndorff-Blanchard, Tugboat, Teddy Long, Ultimate Warrior, Road Warriors.

November 1990: Sting Wins The NWA World Title! "If This Is A Dream, Don't Wake Me." Centerfold: Road Warriors. Plus: Rude-Warrior, Ric Flair, Funk-Hansen, muscle and power.

February 1991: WrestleMania VII Contest. Centerfold: 1991 calendar. Plus: Sid Vicious, DiBiase-Rhodes, Scott Steiner, Power & Glory, Terry Funk.

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April 1991: Sgt. Slaughter Guilty Of Treason! Centerfold: Tom Zenk. Plus: Sting, Magnum T.A., Jesse Ventura, Lawler-Gilbert, Hogan & Warrior.

May 1991: WrestleMania VII Shocker! Who Is Secretly Plotting To Destroy Hulk Hogan Before March 24? Centerfold: Arn Anderson. Plus: Rick Rude, Flair-Sting, Lou Thesz, Rick Steamboat.

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April 1992: Outlook For Sting: Bright And Sunny; Forecast For Luger: Reign Ending! Centerfold: Ric Flair. Plus: Eaton & Anderson, Madusa, Jannetty-Michaels, WWF madness.

May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

June 1992: Exclusive *PWI* Interview: Roddy Piper Speaks Out! Centerfold: Dustin Rhodes. Plus: Dangerously-Sting, Abdullah-Cactus, Sid Justice, Randy Savage.

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October 1992: The Hatred Still Runs Deep: Ultimate Warrior vs. Randy Savage—They'll Settle Up At SummerSlam! Centerfold: Cactus Jack. Plus: Steve Williams, Tom Zenk, WWF title controversy, fire match, Eric Embry.

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May 1993: WrestleMania Without Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: The Undertaker. Plus: Ron Simmons, Cactus Jack, Madusa-Sherri, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior.
April 1995: WWF Title Turmoil. Centerfold: Sabu. Plus: Hulk Hogan, Jim Cornette, Diesel, Alundra Blayze, Dusty-Dustin, Chris Candido.
July 1995: Hulk Hogan: "I Can't Take It Anymore!" Centerfold: Bam Bam Bigelow. Plus: Kevin Sullivan, USWA blood, Yokozuna, Savage & Sherri, revitalize the WWF.
April 1996: WCW World Title Turmoil. Centerfold: The Kid. Plus: Hulk Hogan, Ahmed Johnson, Bob Armstrong, Michaels-Bret, Public Enemy.
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in focus

By Dave Lenker

TEN YEARS FROM NOW IN *PWI* ...

One of the questions Associate Editor Frank Krewda asked Jim Ross during his "Press Conference" with him was, "Where do you see Jim Ross and the WWF five or 10 years from now?" I've been thinking about a more general question a lot lately. "Where do you see wrestling five or 10 years from now?" Or maybe even more relevant, "Where do you see a lot of today's top stars five or 10 years from now?"

I know we've addressed such a question many times before, but I'm not thinking in terms of which federation the stars will competing be in or what titles they might hold. I'm worried about their health.

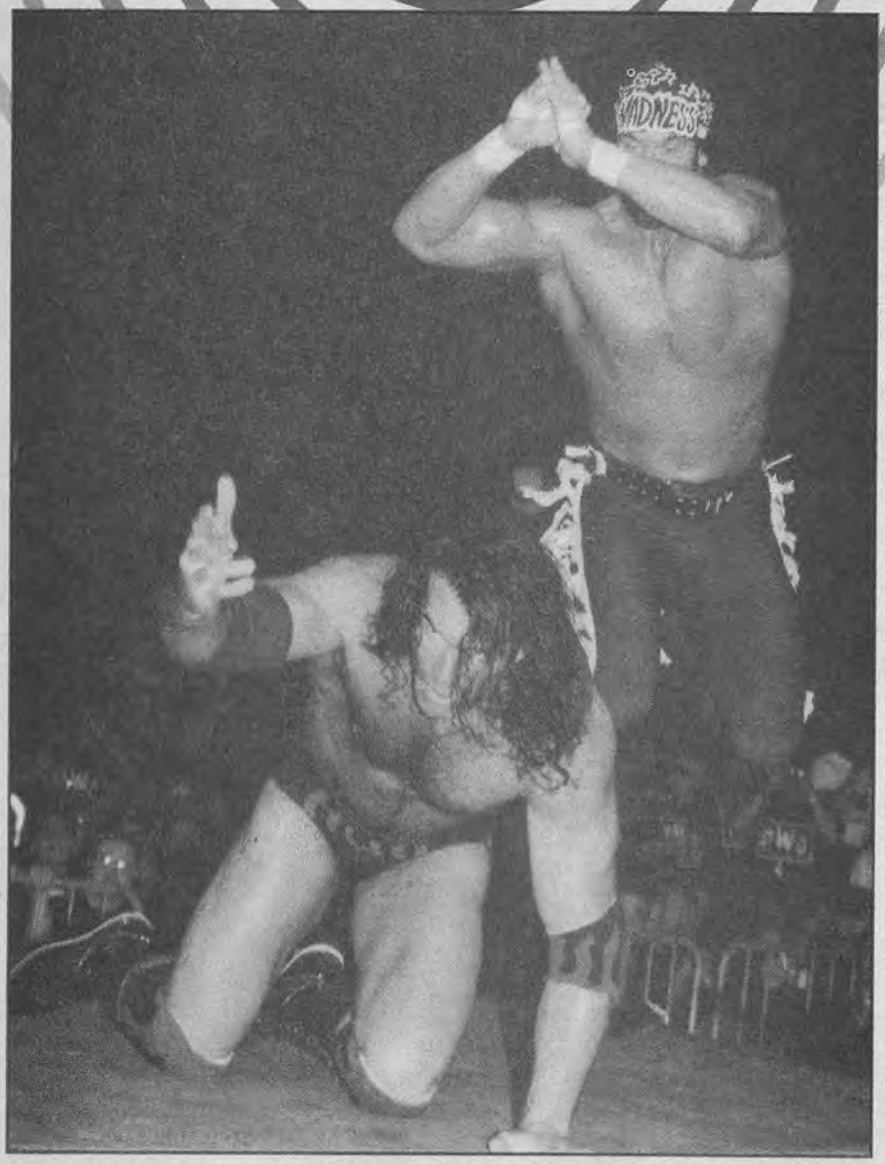
Think about some of the things that have happened in this sport in just the last year. Perry Saturn suffered a catastrophic knee injury that was supposed to keep him out for a year, but he returned in four months. Steve Austin was temporarily paralyzed by an Owen Hart piledriver and came back three months later. Buff Bagwell suffered a serious neck injury when his head slipped out of Rick Steiner's attempted flying bulldog headlock (a relatively low-risk move by today's standards). He might never wrestle again.

Randy Savage suffered a partially torn anterior cruciate ligament in his knee and not only won the WCW World title a few weeks later, but continually refused to take time off to get it fixed. Spike Dudley and New Jack thought nothing of diving off a 15-foot-high balcony at the Asbury Park Convention Center in New Jersey to splash their opponents through tables.

My first thought on that: What will they do to take things to a new extreme? (Hey, fans thought it was cool at the time, but pretty soon they're going to expect something even riskier.)

There are two troubling factors at work here: First, as we all know, more and more wrestlers are using more of a high-risk style than ever before. Do you think that trend will soon reverse? How much would you pay to see three hours of wrestling in which the athletes trade headlocks, chinlocks, basic dropkicks, armbars, and abdominal stretches?

Second, wrestlers seem to have



How much longer can Randy Savage execute flying axhandles when he has a partially torn anterior cruciate ligament in his knee? The "Macho Man" is one of too many wrestlers with too little regard for their long-term futures, says Dave Lenker.

less and less regard for their bodies than ever before. Is Randy Savage showing a lot of guts by not taking time off, or he is just plain stupid for not thinking about his long-term future (his life after wrestling)? You decide. There's a lot of money to be made in the major leagues of professional wrestling these days, and though a wrestler might still be able to draw a paycheck while he's out nursing an injury, there's always the danger that the fans will forget about him while he's away and that he won't be the given the chance to be a star when he is able to come back.

I was talking to one of our most astute correspondents about this the other day, and he told me something scary about one Eastern independent wrestler he has known for about five years. He said this wrestler, who, like too many others, seems to relish taking chair shots to the head (a mentality I'll never understand), speaks noticeably slower than he did two or three years ago. He also slurs his words on occasion. That tends to happen when you suffer too many concussions. I don't want to think about what this guy will be like if he keeps doing this for five or 10 more years.

I know of at least two wrestlers who have suffered more than a dozen concussion in their careers, and both have a few years to go before they even hit age 30.

A lot of the wrestlers who were superstars in the 1960s and '70s struggle to get around today. Most of them didn't use a high-risk style. What are today's stars going to be like in a decade? It's something they need to start thinking about now.

FOR ONE NIGHT, WE *COULD* ALL JUST GET ALONG

On a rainy spring night inside a middle school in Indiana, a little bit of wrestling history was made.

I never would have thought *Brian Pillman* would be the man to unite WCW, the WWF, and ECW. Brian Pillman ... the "Loose Cannon" ... the rogue Horseman ... the "ticking time bomb." Okay, so the war between WCW and the WWF didn't end on April 29 in Norwood, Indiana, but it's comforting to know that these two federations (and ECW) can cooperate to help out a good cause.

Pillman certainly had a big impact on all three before his death last October. So I'm glad representatives from all three promotions showed up that night to help raise money for the Pillman family.

There was ECW's Al Snow joking with Steve Austin as Snow signed plastic foam Heads (Austin was his "Stone-Cold" self most of the night, but he did willingly sign autographs).

Chris Jericho discovered there really are some "Jerichoholics" out there when he posed for pictures with enthusiastic fans (He even let one wear his WCW cruiserweight belt while the shot was taken).

Sunny showed what a big heart she has by donating a lot of valuable stuff, including one of her old Bodydonnas outfits, a bathing suit, and a kiss (which, together with a Chris Candido T-shirt, brought in $115 in the auction).

Even Woman returned to wrestling to help out at the auction and to lend support to her old friend Chris Benoit during his match (he defeated Jericho).

Among the other merchandise auctioned off: two Steve Austin T-shirts, a Four Horsemen T-shirt signed by Arn Anderson, an autographed Goldberg T-shirt, a dress Brian Pillman wore on *Raw*, a Cactus Jack T-shirt, an autographed LOD T-shirt, and Pillman's Cincinnati Bengals jersey.

Among the promotions represented in the matches held that night were WCW, ECW, Ohio Valley Championship Wrestling, HWA, Music City, and the IWA.

A great time was had by the 1,000 or so appreciative people who waited up to an hour in the rain to get into the school for this special event. Best of all, at the end of the night, a check for $23,500 was presented to Melanie Pillman, Brian's widow.

A few hours of cooperation can go a long way. □

That is Sunny holding up a Bill Goldberg T-shirt. Yes, she still works for WWF, and Goldberg still for WCW, but for the sake of Brian Pillman's family (and for one night only), WCW and the WWF worked together.

off the top rope

by Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:

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(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

*I KNOW WHAT you want. You're still dying to see a **real** picture of me on these pages. I can't apologize enough for that mistake of a few issues ago. Rest assured: You'll get the real deal very soon. Maybe. If I'm in a good mood.*

But enough about my beautiful face for now ...

I've never been a huge advocate of ECW, but after watching Wrestlepalooza, I must say that at least one wrestler has turned my pretty head. ECW champion Shane Douglas showed such determination and character in wrestling Al Snow that he must be considered for at least one major year-end Achievement Award.

Think about it. This guy had a bad elbow, a hairline fracture in his cheekbone, and a fractured palate (I guess you stay away from the salty snacks with that one). But instead of crying the blues and inventing excuses (see Shawn Michaels and his smile), Douglas insisted on wrestling and pulled off an upset and gave the "Head" aches.

As for me, not snow, not rain, and not crack in mouth will stop me from my appointed rounds here. For I am your champion.

Dear Brandi:

I am sick and tired of hearing about how *great* Bill Goldberg is. He is one of the biggest no-talents in wrestling. I'll give him some credit. He has great strength and power, but that's it. His wrestling ability is nothing. He's got his "Jackhammer" and that's it. Yeah, he may be able to counter a leglock and turn it into a pin. But give him a real opponent for once. And they wonder why he's undefeated. Go figure.

KYLE AXLINE
Brunswick, MD

Kyle:

Goldberg is manufactured from the top of his bald pate to the merchandised T-shirts he will soon wear. Not to mention that manufactured record. Let's line up as many "canvas-backs" as we can, then sprinkle in some true contenders and hope he gets lucky. But he still seemed like a man of conviction until he was seduced by the "light" side. Goldberg has had the kind of fast start that generally leads to a brief title reign and a year-end Achievement Award. An undefeated record does not impress me in the least. Let's see the records of legends like Ric Flair, Harley Race, and Bob Backlund. Defeats and adversity help to build character. That's something Goldberg does not have.

Dear Queen:

After the events that occurred at WrestleMania XIV, the icon, Shawn Michaels, has been run out of commission by that overrated punk/sellout, "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin. I mean, the guy is too busy pandering to the fans to beat a wrestler of HBK's caliber. I want to know who you would rather see as champ, the "showstopper" (HBK), or the "Rattlesnake" (Steve Austin).

CHRIS SMITH
ChrisBulls@aol.com

You people go right ahead and keep cheering Goldberg all you want. And I suggest he enjoy his success while it lasts. Because I have no reason to believe it will last much longer.

I fear that The Ultimate Warrior will soon be back in wrestling. But I'm comforted by the knowledge that when he does come back, he won't hang around long. He never does.

Chris:

Why don't you ask me if I'd rather stick a carrot peeler up my nose and turn it counterclockwise or snip the piece of skin that attaches my lip to my gums. Hairless and soon-to-be leave me with no choice whatsoever.

Dear Brandi:

Is Vince McMahon really crazy enough to think that he can beat "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin? Vince would have been going out on a stretcher in two minutes. After he tried to screw "Stone-Cold" out of the belt at Unforgiven, McMahon needed that chair shot to the head to bring him back to the real world! What do you think about Austin's "conspiracy theory" and how he reacted?

JOE TYMAN
Lexington, MA

Joe:

How would you act if one of your employees attacked you without provocation at the drop of a hat? Austin attacked McMahon because the crowd wanted him to do it. Now Vince is taking it out on him. Why? Because he can! He owns the joint. Honestly now, what did you expect Vince to do? Every other champion fell in line in one way or another. Austin chose to be a rebel without a clue. Austin's belligerence might turn into his comeuppance. I can't wait.

Dear Brandi:

I am the biggest Ultimate Warrior fan. But these days I just don't know what he's doing. I want to know if The Ultimate Warrior plans on returning to the ring and what organization will he go to and any other info you have on him. He is The Man!

RYAN SMITH
ShooterECW@aol.com

Ryan:

The Warrior is preoccupied with planning something that will give the Warrior as much attention as he can get. Chances are the Warrior will turn up in WCW, for that is where no bridges were burned by the Warrior. For you, an obvious Warrior fan, you need to do one thing: Take some turpentine to your puss and wash off the paint. The Warrior's presence in wrestling means that a real competitor who is both dedicated and talented will have to be sacrificed. If he does reappear, let's hope the Warrior continues his pattern. Big debut and then a quick, shameful exit.

Dear Brandi:

I would like to comment on the Bret Hart situation in WCW. First and foremost, Bret Hart hurts any federation he goes to. In the days that Hart was with the WWF, they scored very low ratings and were dominated by WCW. Then Hart arrives in WCW. Then something unbelievable happened. The WWF beat WCW in the ratings war after almost two years! Well, now the WWF has momentum. So what I'm asking is this: Why does Bret Hart bring low ratings?

GARY GLATKI
mistic1@massed.net

Gary:

Salient comments. Could it be coincidence, or could there be a Hart curse? It seems that every time he turns bad, so do the ratings for his home federation. It could be a wholesale lack of acceptance of Bret's antics or just coincidence. Let me say, for the record, that on this rulebreaking go-round, I'm with the "Hitman." Bret Hart shows true character and a sense of commitment by betraying WCW as he did the WWF. I have to give him the benefit of the doubt. This time, there is no cantankerous crying over American fans vs. all others. He just raises hell and gives Tony Schiavone a case of on-air histrionics. What more could you want? □

The battles between Bret Hart and Curt Hennig in WCW didn't interest me all that much. What has piqued my interest is the latest change in attitude by the "Hitman." I like it.

"NERDS!"

You pansies just sit there readin' 'bout wrestling, but you never DO anything. Here's your chance, *punk!*

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

1. Airplane spin
2. Armbar
3. Armdrag
4. Armlock
5. Arm stretch
6. Arm whip
7. Asian spike
8. Bear hug
9. Biting
10. Body slam
11. Body tackle
12. Chicken wing
13. Choke
14. Claw
15. Clothesline
16. Cross body block
17. Double axehandle
18. Drop kick
19. Eagle split
20. Elbow smash
21. Eye gouge
22. Face rake
23. Fireman's carry ram
24. Flying body press
25. Flying clothesline
26. Flying drop kick
27. Flying elbow drop
28. Flying head butt
29. Flying mare
30. Forearm smash
31. Foreign object
32. Full nelson
33. Giant swing
34. Grapevine
35. Hair pulling
36. Hammerlock
37. Head lock
38. Head stomp
39. Heart punch
40. Hip roll
41. Irish whip
42. Knee drop
43. Leglock
44. Manager interference
45. Monkey flip
46. Overhead toss
47. Pole ram
48. Reverse chinlock
49. Rolling scissors
50. Rope burn
51. Savate kick
52. Scissors grip
53. Shoulder breaker
54. Slingshot
55. Snap mare
56. Step-over toe hold
57. Suplex
58. Surfboard
59. Turnbuckle smash
60. Wristlock

SET-UP HOLDS

61. Abdominal stretch
62. Atomic drop
63. Avalanche
64. Backbreaker
65. Backroll press
66. Belly to belly
67. Big splash
68. Boston crab
69. Brain buster
70. Bulldog
71. Camel clutch
72. Cobra clutch
73. Cradle
74. Crucifix
75. DDT
76. Figure four
77. Flying leg drop
78. Gourd buster
79. Indian death lock
80. Neckbreaker
81. Piledriver
82. Power bomb
83. Power slam
84. Russian sickle
85. Sleeper
86. Slingshot suplex
87. Small package
88. Spine buster
89. Sunset flip
90. Superplex

OPPONENTS

1. Big Ben
2. Ace Stevens
3. Jaeger van Dorn
4. Bodybag Jones
5. Wildfire Johnny Rage
6. Eric Darkstrom
7. Nook the Secret Weapon
8. Derek Craven
9. El Diablo Sanchez
10. Tygar Singh

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create an imaginary wrestler using this coupon or a copy of it.
2. Send it with $1 for each opponent to:

   IWA CHALLENGE
   BOX 5275
   WILLOWICK, OH 44095

3. See if your wrestler wins the *ACTUAL CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING BELT* in the IWA's exclusive "Rookie Brawl."
4. Compete with friends each month for great prizes, like engraved plaques and more championship belts!

"Join today... *OR ELSE!*"

YOUR NAME *(PLEASE PRINT)* _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

WRESTLER'S NAME *(NO PRO WRESTLER NAMES)* _____

Wear-Down Holds (#1-60): Choose 10. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

Set-Up Holds (#61-90): Choose 5. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

Finishing Hold: Create your own final maneuver or choose a hold from the 90 shown.

_____

Opponents: Mark the numbers of the men you wish to challenge.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

SHUTTUPA YOU FACE!

The FBI Demands The Fans' Respect!

One is from Tennessee. The second is from Atlanta. The third is from Queens, New York. But if they want to call themselves The Full-Blooded Italians, who's gonna stop 'em?

By Dave Rosenbaum

HE IS BILLED from Sicily. You know Sicily; it's an island just south of Italy. You know Italy. The country that's shaped like a boot. Southern Europe. Italy. Got it?

The only problem is, in an "Introducing" feature in the September 1996 issue of THE WRESTLER, Little Guido spoke extensively about his hometown ... Howard Beach, Queens.

You know Howard Beach, Queens. Well, maybe you don't. It's

Tracey Smothers (above, vs. Super Nova) and Tommy Rich (right, vs. Jerry Lynn) are a couple of wrestling's true good ol' boys, right? Wrong!

the home of imprisoned mobster John Gotti, himself the subject of several television movies. Queens. New York. United States. You know, the United States. Land of the free, home of the brave.

A place, apparently, where people from Howard Beach are free to say they're from Sicily.

Hey, Little Guido can say he's from wherever he wants to be from, and you can't stop him. So shuttupa you face!

Got that?

Tommy Rich. You know him. Former NWA World heavyweight champion. Born in Hendersonville, Tennessee. And you know what they say about place of birth. It's permanent.

But if Tommy Rich wants to say he's from Little Atlanta, Italy, then you can't stop him.

Got that?

And Tracey Smothers. Native of Atlanta, Georgia. Born and raised. Former star in the Smoky Mountain area. He's also a former native of Atlanta. Now he's from Nashville ... Italy.

And if Tracey Smothers wants to say he's from Nashville, Italy, a place that doesn't exist on *any* map, then you can't stop him.

Got that?

So shuttupa you face.

Tommy Rich is The Big Don. Smothers and Little Guido are his cohorts in crime. Together, they're The Full-Blooded Italians.

FBI to you.

Got that?

The way things have been working, Rich and Smothers have

been trying to teach Little Guido, a former amateur wrestler, about professional wrestling.

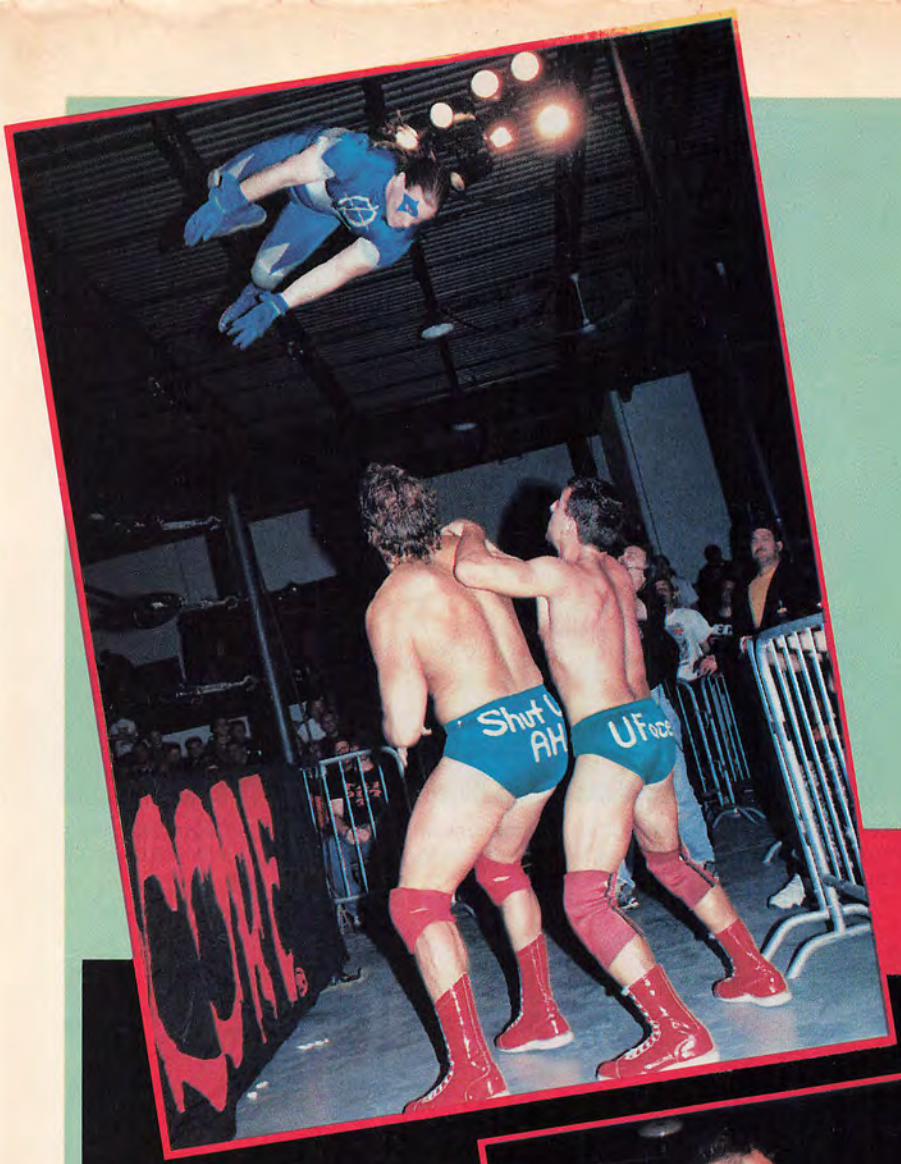
And Guido, because one hand washes the other, is teaching Smothers and Rich to be Italian.

Always eat your pasta with a fork and a spoon ... don't fight at the dinner table ... go to church on Sundays ... Francis Albert Sinatra was *the* Chairman of the Board ... and never, *never* say bad things about anybody else's mother.

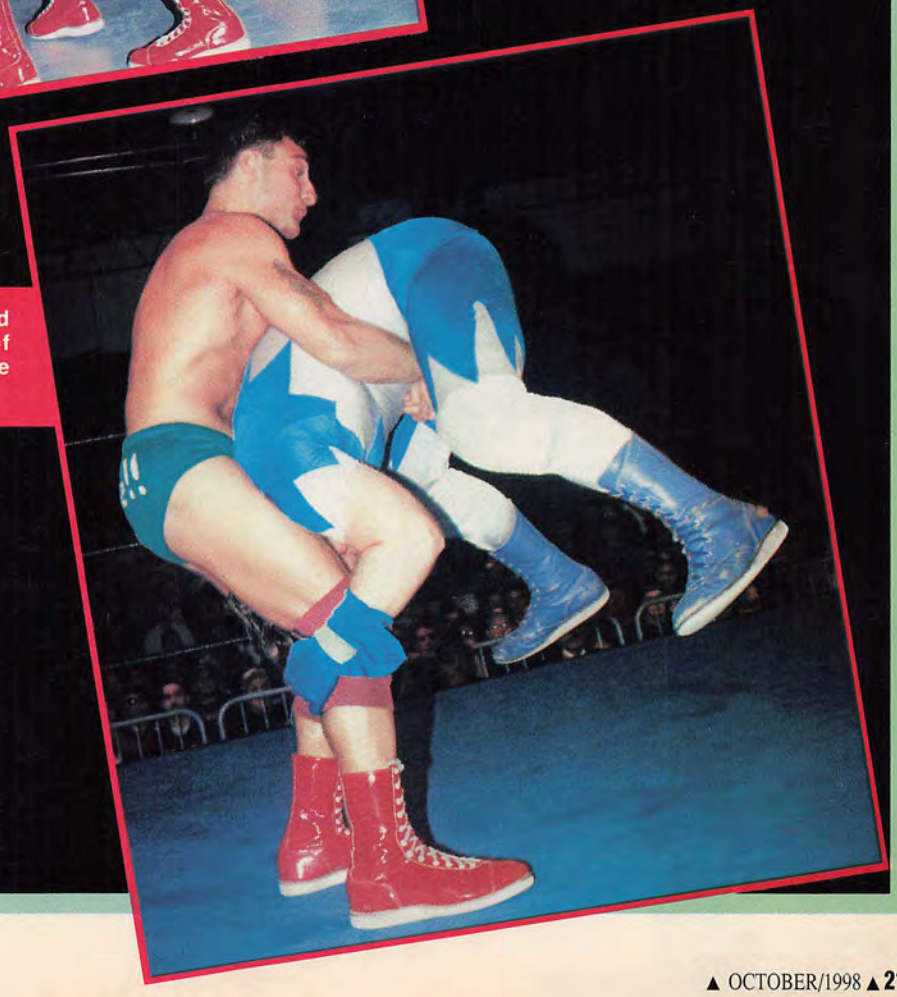
Is this a joke, or what?

"Whut, you don't take us seriously?" Rich said, motioning awkwardly with his hands. "Well, it's time to take us seriously. We were the ECW tag team champions,

(Continued on page 46)



Super Nova goes airborne against The Full-Blooded Italians. Think they're silly? The backs of Smothers and Little Guido's trunks are their answer to you!



ECW fans only wish that Guido could control the odd mannerisms of Smothers and Rich as well as he's able to control Super Nova.

press conference...

Jim Ross and Jim Cornette discuss a point during a broadcast of *Raw Is War*. Ross backs Cornette's view that WCW has no right to trace its origins back to the NWA. Kevin Kelly and Michael Cole (far right) are also part of the *Raw* broadcast team.

JIM ROSS

ALTHOUGH MOST FANS know him as the voice of the World Wrestling Federation, Jim Ross is much more than a talking head. As senior vice president of talent relations and wrestling administration for the WWF, Ross has played a key role in the promotion's recent successes, yet he insists the credit go to the athletes, not the executives of his company.

In fact, most of what Ross does for the WWF goes unnoticed by the masses. Ironing out contract negotiations, sitting through endless scouting sessions, and haggling with lawyers are just some of the tedious, behind-the-scenes "VP things" J.R. does happily—as long as he gets those two hours in front of the WWF faithful on ***Raw Is War*** *every Monday night.*

Announcing. Broadcasting. Color commentary. Blow-by-blow. He doesn't care what you call it—it's all a labor of love. Strapping on the headset and calling the action is Jim Ross' passion. And passion has always been part of his wrestling/broadcasting philosophy, because Ross has always been, regardless of his professional capacity, a fan.

That passion and a dose of genuine talent have helped this fan from Oklahoma survive a prior stint with the WWF, a rocky stint with WCW, and a career-threatening case of Bell's palsy. His career has seen its share of ups and downs, but right now Jim Ross and the WWF are certainly in "up" mode.

J.R. recently sat down with Associate Editor Frank Krewda to discuss at length the WWF's resurgence and a host of other topics.

FRANK KREWDA: How did you get your start in broadcasting?

JIM ROSS: i actually got started in college, when my fraternity promoted a wrestling match for a fundraiser back in Oklahoma, at Northeastern State University. I met Cowboy Bill Watts and Leroy McGuirk and developed a relationship with them, then went to work for them as kind of an office boy. Leroy was blind, so I did a lot of driving, wrote some publicity stories, helped promote some markets. Then I started refereeing, then I started announcing. I sort of hit the gamut there in the early days.

KREWDA: How did you make the transition from the announcing end to the business end?

ROSS: Well, I think through the years, you get an opportunity to get a variety of experiences. I've always considered myself a fan, so consequently, I think that in my own view, I have a solid view and a solid judgment of wrestling talent. And Vince McMahon presented the opportunity for me to head up the talent relations department, which would essentially have me involved in talent recruiting, contract negotiation, scheduling, things of that type for the talent. I think it was a culmination of all the experiences I've had, all the time remaining enthusiastic about the business, the bottom line being I've always been a fan.

KREWDA: Can you compare working for Bill Watts to working for Vince McMahon? Was one like a father-son relationship, while the other was strictly business?

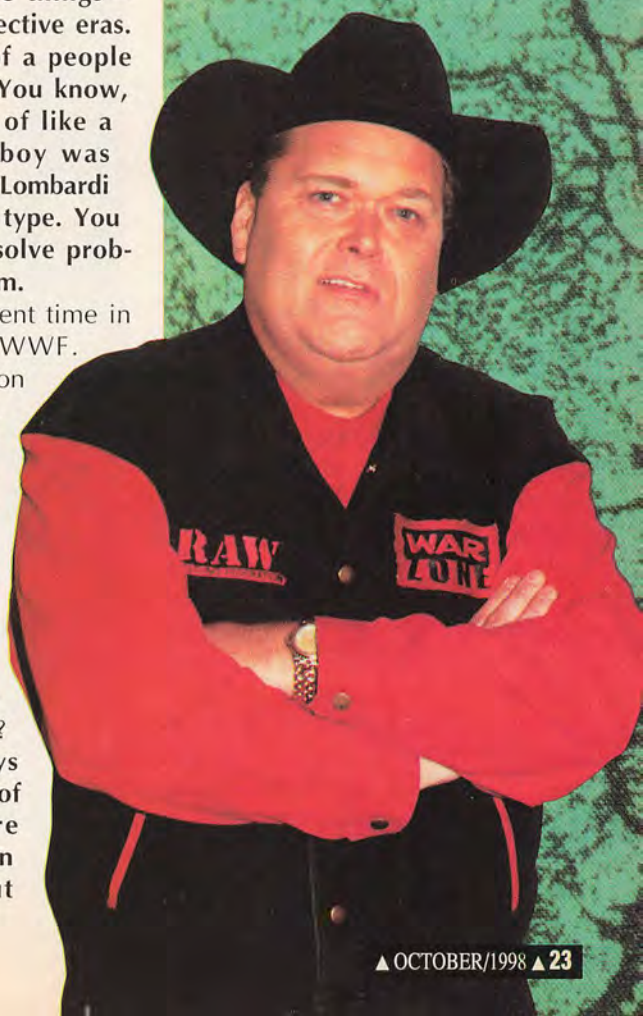
ROSS: I looked at Cowboy like a mentor. When I first met him, I was 19 years old. So I was certainly very impressionable. He certainly helped me form a lot of my philosophy about wrestling. My relationship with Vince is much more on a business level. Cowboy and I had such a strong business relationship, but because I met him when I was so young, we had an opportunity to develop a friendship over the years as well. That's certainly not to say that Vince and I aren't friends. But we are certainly more business associates ... Both men, you could say, have exhibited genius in this business by some of the things they have done—innovative things—both in their own respective eras. Vince is much more of a people person than Cowboy. You know, Vince could be more of like a players' coach. Cowboy was much more like a Vince Lombardi type, a Jimmy Johnson type. You know, Cowboy didn't solve problems—he eliminated them.

KREWDA: You've spent time in both WCW and the WWF. What would your reaction be to a parent who says, "I've seen what goes on on *Raw Is War*. Those things do not go on at *Nitro*, so I'm not allowing my child to watch *Raw*; it's too lewd"? Would a complaint like that cause you and Vince to rethink your programming philosophy?

ROSS: You're always going have a segment of the audience that are going have their own personal beliefs about

"I would encourage parents that if they are that sincerely turned off by what we're doing, that they change the channel and watch something else. If that happens to be WCW, that's certainly the viewer's prerogative."

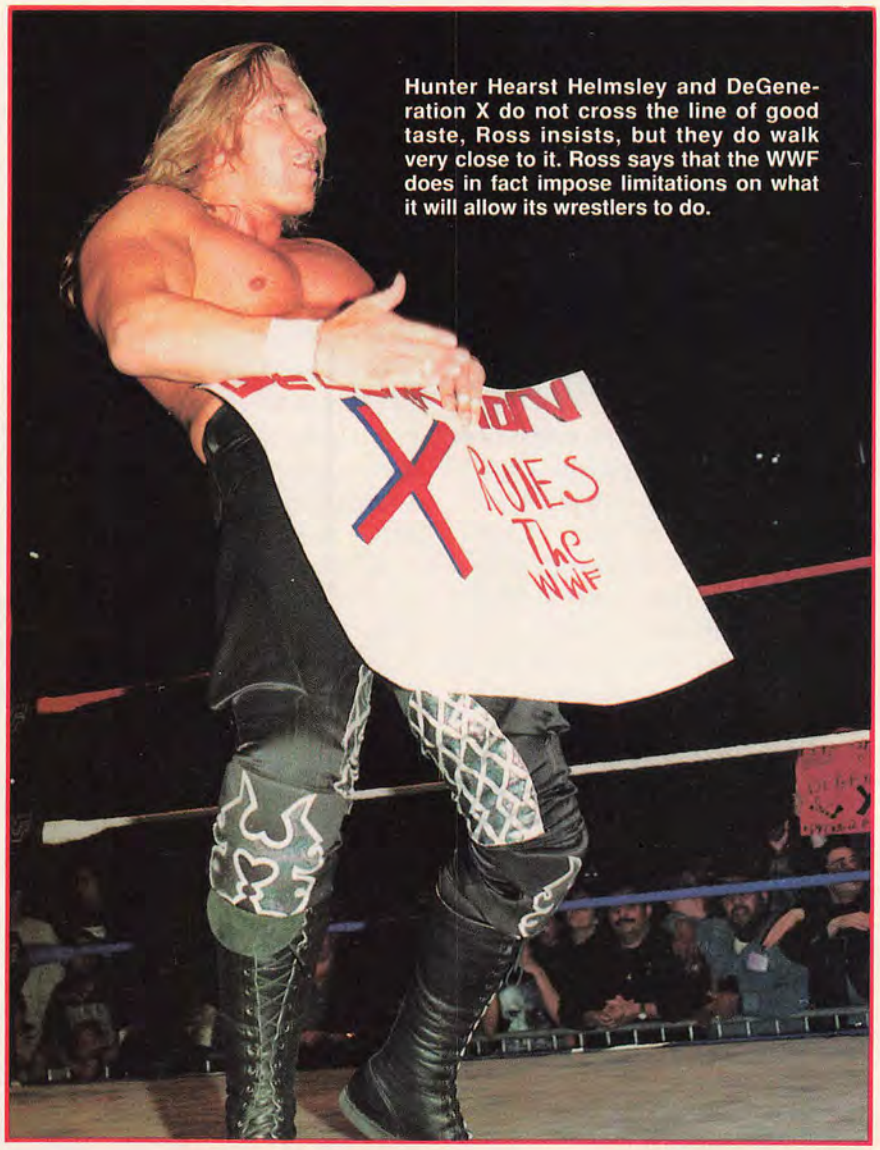
Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.



Three Oklahoma Sooners, Jerry Brisco, Bill Watts, and Ross, pose at the 1995 WWF Hall of Fame dinner. Ross credits Watts and Leroy McGuirk for giving him his start in the wrestling business.

what should happen. I would never, ever venture—nor do I have the right—to tell a parent what their children—or the parent, for that matter—should or should not watch. I would encourage parents that if they are that sincerely turned off by what we're doing that they change the channel and watch something else. If that happens to be WCW, that's certainly the viewer's prerogative. What we're trying to do is entertain, and to be as reality-based as we possibly can, and I think based on what our television ratings have been, based on our house, our arena successes, based on the marketing numbers that are coming in—not only nationally but internationally—I think that we're on the right track.

And, yes, it is a departure from the traditionalist sense of wrestling. There used to be a very broad line between fan favorites and villains, and that line has basically been erased in the way that we present our product. You try to keep the issues with the athletes more on a personal level. It seems like fans always got more involved and interested when issues became personal—that's when things became exciting and unpredictable. So we don't think we're changing. We're no different than some other programming on television that have made a departure. I mean, *NYPD Blue* is certainly different from *Dragnet*. You know, *South Park* is certainly different from *The Jetsons*, another animated series. It's like *The Simpsons*—they were outrageous. But if you think back a long time ago, there used to be a disclaimer on *All My Children*. When Elizabeth Montgomery stopped wearing a bra on *Bewitched*, people were up in arms. When Cher showed her bellybutton in the early-'70s, people were like, "I'm not going let my kid watch that—there's a navel exposed." So we continue to evolve in what the public will accept or not accept, and we'll *never* go over the line of accep-



Hunter Hearst Helmsley and DeGeneration X do not cross the line of good taste, Ross insists, but they do walk very close to it. Ross says that the WWF does in fact impose limitations on what it will allow its wrestlers to do.

tance. But we're going to walk that line because we think it provides provocative and entertaining TV.

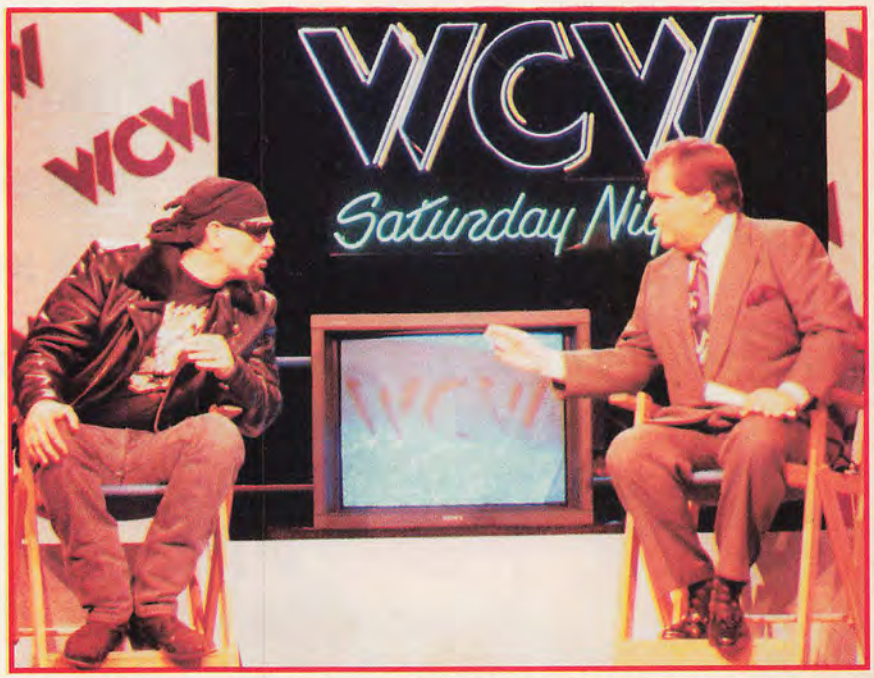
KREWDA: I understand that Home Shopping Network CEO Barry Diller has issued a warning to the producers of *The Jerry Springer Show,* the same producers of *Raw,* to tone down the violent content of the show. Has the WWF received any such warning?

ROSS: We've only had very positive conversations with Mr. Diller. We've only had conversations to further establish our relationship with USA Television. He's very excited about working with us on a variety of projects in a variety of his entities. He realizes what we provide for USA on a 52-week basis, not only on Mondays, but Saturdays and Sundays as well. He's very excited about the opportunities. *Jerry Springer* is a talk show that is being compared to Oprah and other things that are more mundane, more tame, so I would be very surprised if Jerry Springer tones down very much because, quite simply, he gets ratings, and he gets results. But again, we are not going to go too far, or embarrass our sponsors or the executives from the USA Network.

KREWDA: What then is "too far"? Where do you draw the line? Maybe you should tell us what we *won't* see on *Raw Is War.*

ROSS: We hope we're not going to see overt, gratuitous violence. You're not going see male-on-female violence. There are certain places that we're not going to go. You're not going hear issues based solely on race or creed. We're not going to become political. We're not going to delve into religion. We're not going to offend people's religion or political views or their heritage. We're not going have men beating up women. We're not going have violence for violence sake. But we are going to promote aggression.

KREWDA: Speaking of violence and aggression, what is the status of that working agreement between the WWF and ECW?

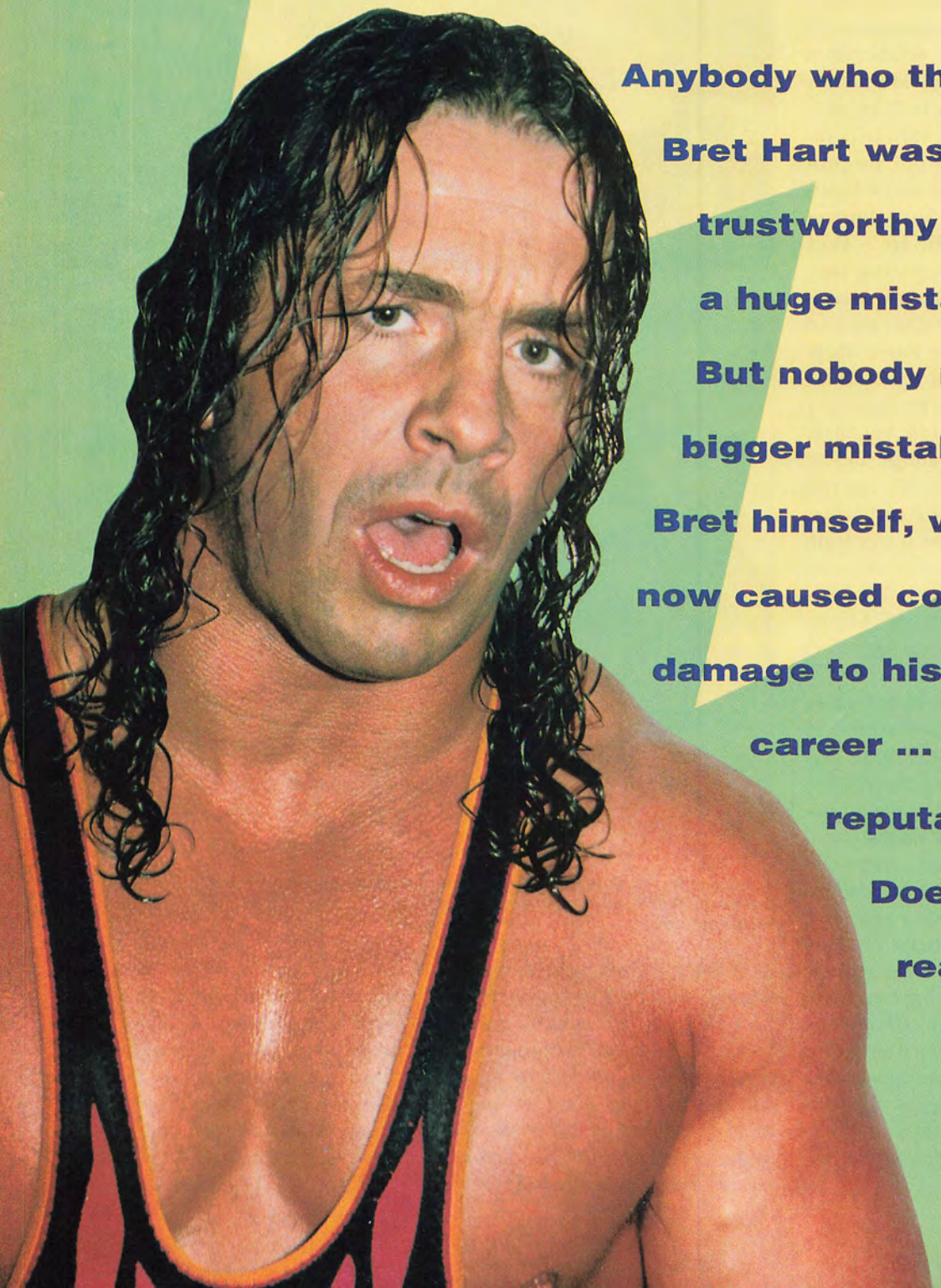


Ross is still very bitter over the manner in which he was relieved of his announcing duties at WCW, where he worked with both Tony Schiavone (top) and Jesse Ventura (above).

ROSS: I have a very strong relationship with Paul Heyman. I helped Paul Heyman in the early going of his career as far as his broadcasting was concerned. He's told people, and he's told me—and I'm very flattered—that I helped him a great deal in the younger part of his career. So we are very open-minded, we will do anything with ECW that will entertain our audience. We are not enemies with ECW. We have placed talent there. We wish them only success. And it's not to say that next week we'll have them on our TV, or the week after. It's an open door to them. If they choose to walk through

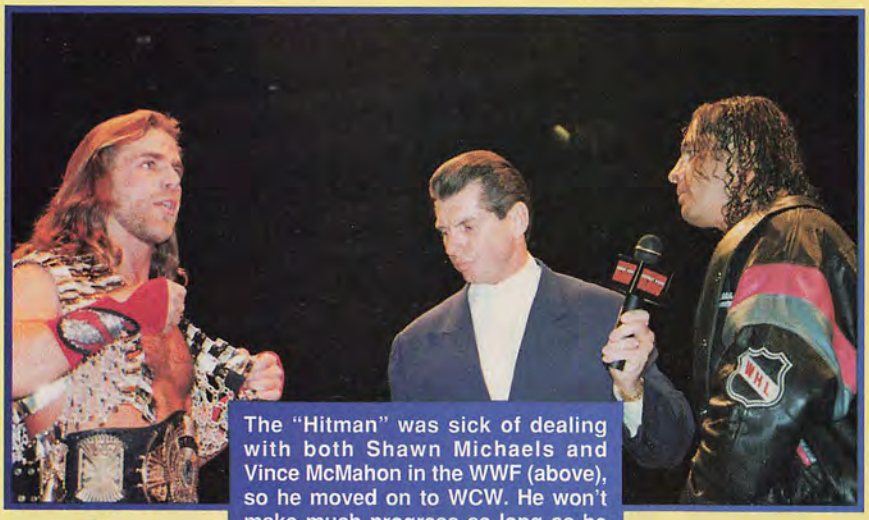
(Continued on page 52)

BRET SCREWS

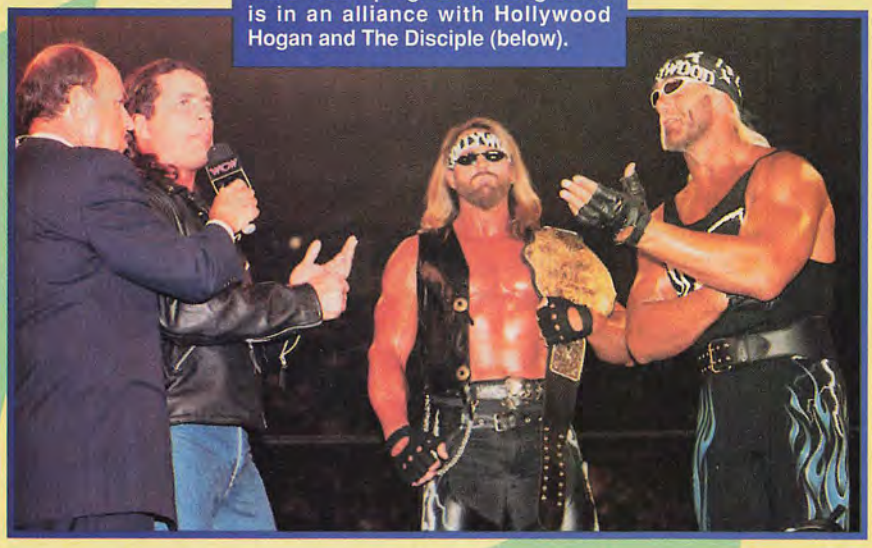


Anybody who thought Bret Hart was trustworthy made a huge mistake. But nobody made a bigger mistake than Bret himself, who has now caused considerable damage to his own career ... and his reputation. Does he even realize it?

BRET, PART II



The "Hitman" was sick of dealing with both Shawn Michaels and Vince McMahon in the WWF (above), so he moved on to WCW. He won't make much progress as long as he is in an alliance with Hollywood Hogan and The Disciple (below).



By Dave Rosenbaum

HE HAS BEEN a tough man to figure, this Bret Hart, as he sways with the wind trying to make up his mind. One year he's with the fans, the next he's against them. Two years ago he's feuding with his brother, Owen Hart, the next year he's on the same side. One day he hates Hulk Hogan, the next day he protects him—and even helps him win the WCW World title!

Bret constantly talks about how he's the best there is, the best there was, and the best there ever will be, but he doesn't act like he believes his own words.

Maybe he has never completely gotten over what happened to him at the 1997 Survivor Series, when Shawn Michaels won the WWF World title from him even though Bret clearly didn't submit to Michaels' "sharpshooter." WWF owner Vince McMahon Jr. didn't care about that little detail.

"Bret screwed Bret," McMahon said when asked whether he had cheated Hart out of the World title. McMahon knew Hart was leaving for WCW; he had no desire to watch the WWF World heavyweight belt leave, too.

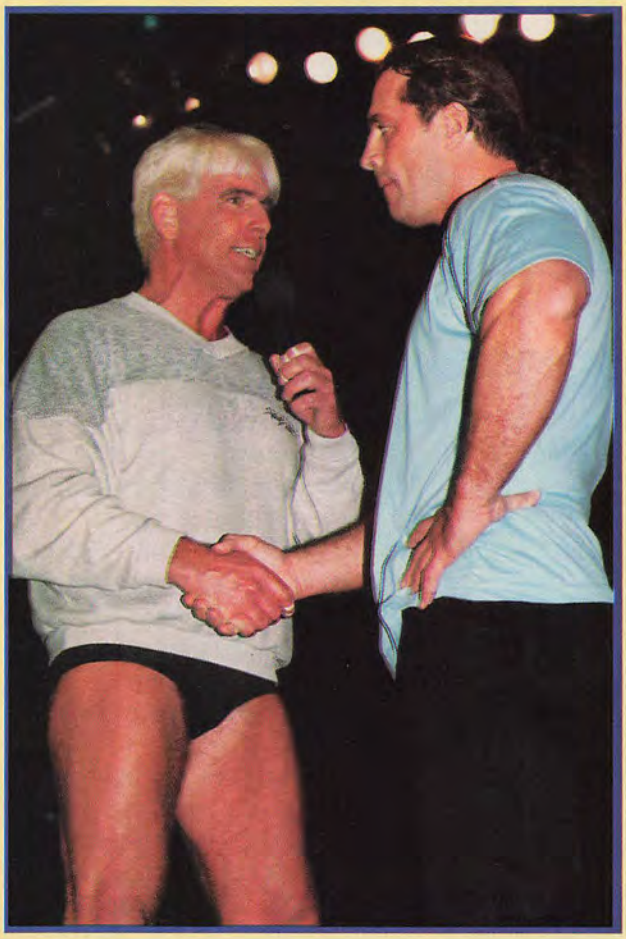
But more than a half-year after McMahon spoke those famous words—words that at the time seemed like nothing more than the angry utterings of a bitter promoter who had been spurned and burned again by WCW—there's ample reason to believe Vince might have been right. Now it looks like by befriending Hogan, the "Hitman" has screwed the "Hitman" again.

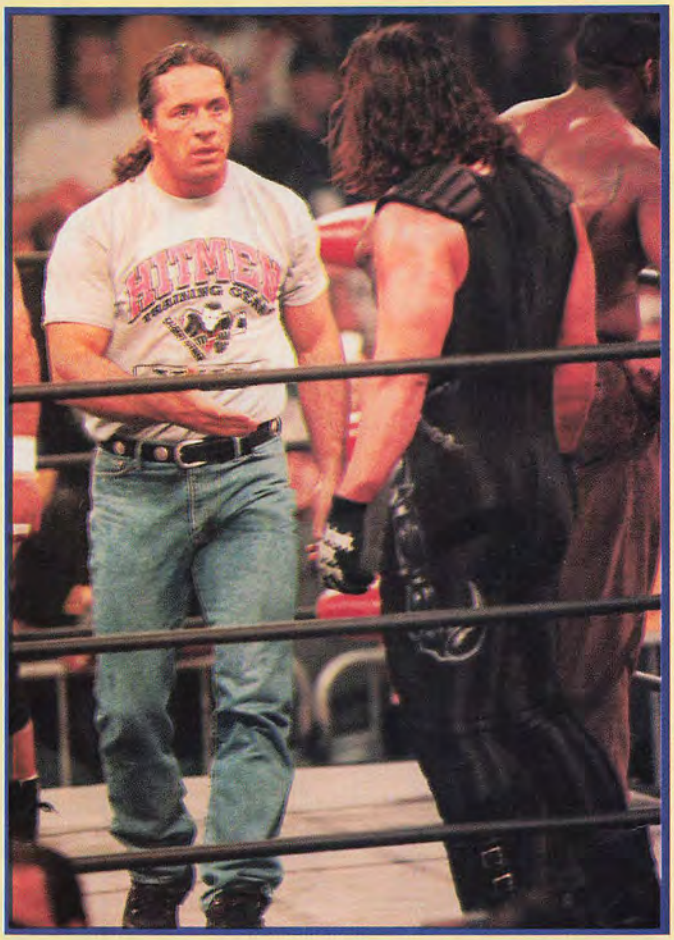
Here's why.

HE'LL NEVER GET HIS SHOT AT HOGAN

What can mean more to a man like Hart than a world championship? He is a five-time WWF World champion, and at this stage of his career, there's no reason for him to keep wrestling other than to win more titles. Financially, he is as secure as his place in wrestling history. He's said all along that his goal was to win the WCW World title, to become only the fifth man in wrestling history—Randy Savage, Ric Flair, Buddy Rogers, and Hulk Hogan are the others—to win both the WWF and NWA/WCW world belts.

So what has he done? He has sided with Hogan, the champion,





Bret extends a hand to Ric Flair (above) and Sting (above right), but seems to have reserved a singular finger on that same hand for his former fans.

the one man who will do everything and anything in his power to keep his sternest challengers on his side. Even worse, Hart helped Hogan regain the World title from Savage at a time when Hart would have been far better off if Savage had the belt.

And now Hart has set himself up to be used. Hogan, the greatest people user of all, is at war with Savage and Kevin Nash, the leaders of the Wolfpac faction of the NWO. Hogan knows as well as anyone that Hart and Nash had a long feud in the WWF. Hart won the World title from Nash in 1995. Nash was also good friends with Shawn Michaels, a man Hart still despises.

What's next on the WCW feud docket? Probably not Hogan vs. Nash, and certainly not Hogan vs. Hart ... it's probably Nash vs. Hart.

And Hogan will have fended off two challengers without lifting a finger.

HE'S DOUBLE-CROSSED HIS FAMILY

Even during the peak years of their feud, Owen and Bret had something in common: a hatred for Hogan and all he stands for. The Harts stood for pure mat wrestling and the beauty of the sport. Hogan stood for brawling and pandering to the lowest common denominator.

Flashback to WrestleMania IX: Yokozuna defeats Bret for the WWF World title. Later that night in Las Vegas, Hogan challenges Yokozuna to an impromptu match and beats him for the belt in 25 seconds. All of a sudden, the "Hitman" isn't even in line for title shots. He and Hogan are both fan favorites.

Hart has always resented Hogan's actions that evening. Bret felt Hogan stuck his nose where it didn't belong and took advantage of his misfortune.

"Typical Hogan," Bret once spat.

"Always looking out for himself. He made it sound like he was doing something great for the fans and the WWF, but he was only out for himself, like he always is."

How could he? the Hart family must be wondering. *How could he side with the enemy? Anyone but Hogan.*

HE'S VINDICATED VINCE

McMahon's bitter post-Survivor Series sputterings no longer seem so bitter, do they? After Survivor Series, McMahon told anyone who would listen that Bret wasn't worth the money WCW was paying him and that Bret could be difficult to deal with at times.

WCW knows all about that. The powers-that-be went out of their way to spend big money and sign a top wrestler for their federation. And what did Bret do? He defected to the NWO and became an enemy of the people who are paying him.

Incredibly, Vince warned them.

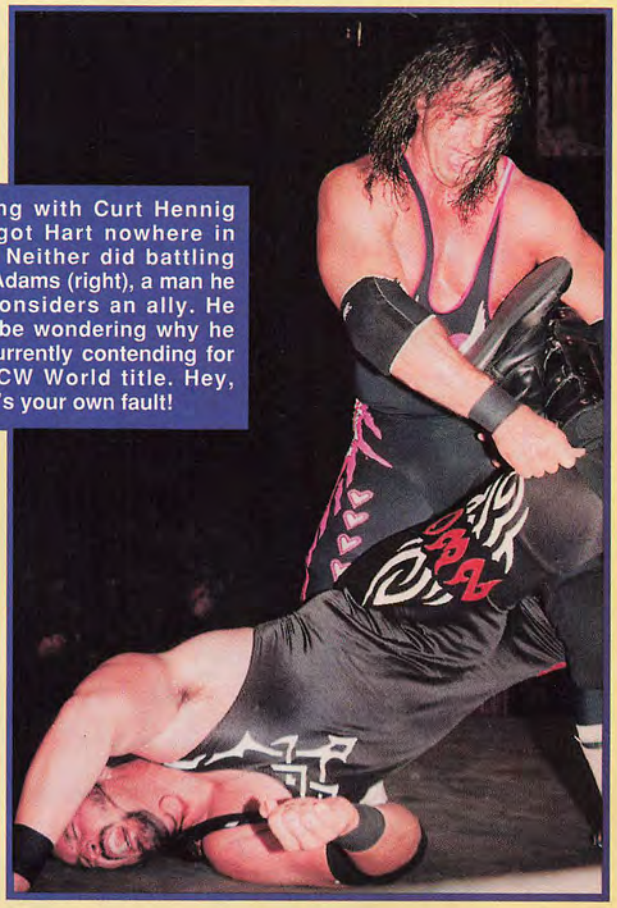
HE'S AT WAR WITH THE FANS–AGAIN

Hey, fans, haven't you been fooled enough times? Didn't Hogan fool you? Didn't Savage fool you? Now Bret. Again. What is Bret? What's he all about? Is he a fan favorite, an anti-American rule-breaker, or just whatever he feels like being at any given time?

For years, Bret told us he was a role model. Parents told their children, "Watch this man." They did, and Bret double-crossed them. He played the bad guy role at the end of his WWF tenure, then played the good guy role when he arrived in WCW. Before long, he was a bad guy again. He says that trying to be a hero to Americans isn't worth the effort.

Bret always told us that he wanted our respect. We gave it to him. Aren't *we* the fools?

Maybe so. But in this sordid ordeal, there is no bigger fool than Bret Hart. Whether he realizes it or not. □



Feuding with Curt Hennig (left) got Hart nowhere in WCW. Neither did battling Brian Adams (right), a man he now considers an ally. He might be wondering why he isn't currently contending for the WCW World title. Hey, Bret: It's your own fault!

SPECIAL EXAMINATION:

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO MARCUS BAGWELL

Few things in professional wrestling are as irritating as Marcus "Buff" Bagwell strutting his "stuff" around the ring. But on April 22, that "stuff" saved his career

By Frank Krewda

BUFF BAGWELL HAD felt the effects of Rick Steiner's flying bulldog headlock many times before, but there was something odd about the bulldog Steiner attempted on this rare Wednesday night *Thunder*. Normally, the muscular Georgian would have shaken off the concussive effects and continued the match.

But as the "Dogfaced Gremlin" drove Bagwell face-first to the canvas, he lost his grip and Bagwell jammed his head into Steiner's back. Upon impact, Buff knew something was wrong.

He couldn't move.

"I was disoriented for a one-two-thousand count," he said. "Then I became completely aware that I was paralyzed. I couldn't uncross my legs. Scotty [Steiner] tried to move my arm, but it just flopped over."

For the next four minutes, Bag-

well, 28, lay in the ring, completely paralyzed from the neck down. Then he recovered feeling in his left hand and leg, followed by his right extremities. Remarkably, he was walking within 45 minutes, but those four minutes on the mat seemed like four years to Bagwell, who spent the time in conversation with God.

"My first reaction was, *Oh, my God! I'm paralyzed!* For the first two minutes, all I could think was, *I'm too young. I have too much to offer. I'm not ready for this.* I got into an argument with God. But in the third and fourth minutes, I just accepted it. That's when I regained feeling."

Fans might chuckle at the notion of him talking to God, but Bagwell, a born-again Christian, is a very spiritual man—even though he prefers to keep his relationship with the Lord off-camera.

Throughout this ordeal, faith has served Bagwell well. Not only has it helped him overcome the initial trauma, but it also pulled him through some tense moments after he had surgery to remove a fragmented disk that was impinging on his spine. Although that surgery was a success—doctors grafted part of his hip to serve as a washer between his C3 and C4 vertebrae—a blood clot developed and nearly closed his windpipe. Bagwell needed emergency surgery to restore his breathing.

One day after his discharge, Bagwell was leveled by a case of food poisoning. The next day, he had trouble breathing again, so it was back to the hospital for round two of emergency surgery. Once more, his breathing was restored, but after a few days of convalescence, the swelling in his neck would not subside. Doctors wanted to drain the baseball-sized lump, but Bagwell begged off. "I was not going under the knife a fourth time," he said.

Eventually, the swelling subsided on its own, and now Bagwell says he feels great. His spirits have been buoyed by a tremendous outpouring of fan support—3,000 pieces of mail in the first four days in the hospital—and the support of both NWO *and* WCW locker rooms.

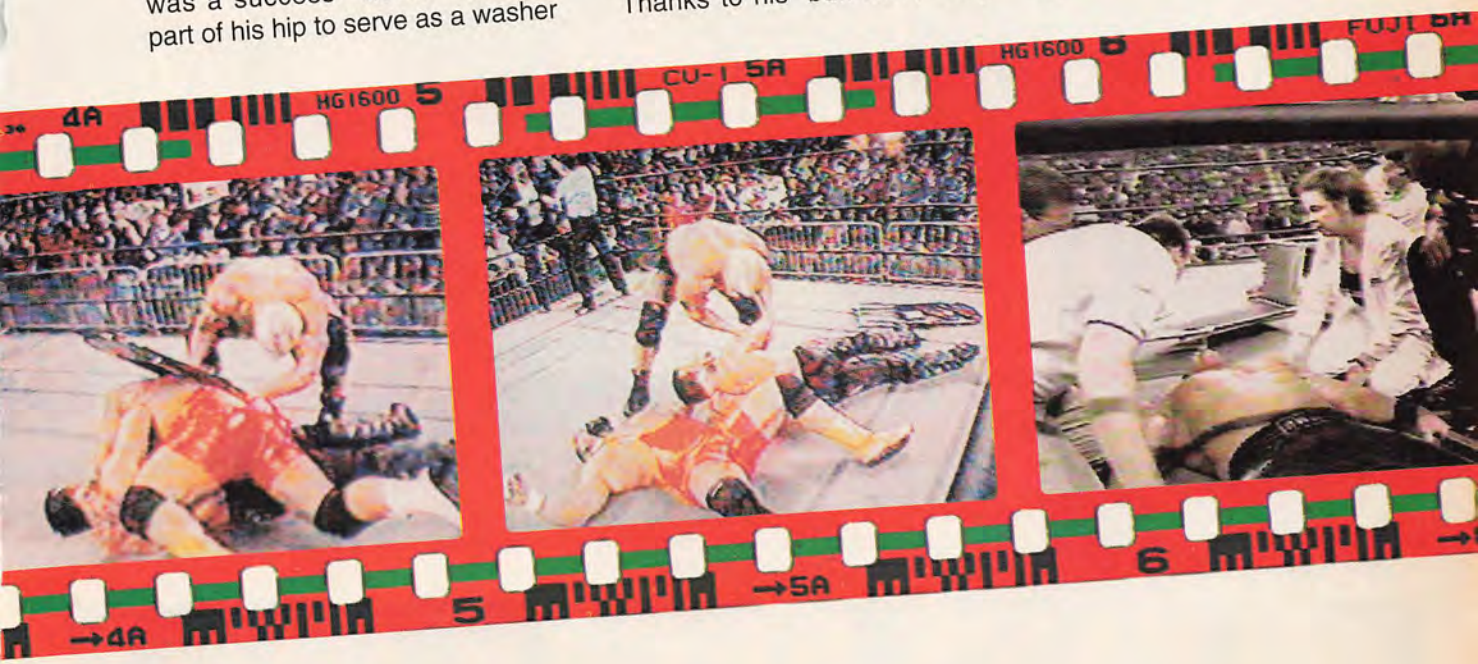
"The amazing thing," he recalled, "is that when they brought me backstage, Lex Luger and Sting put our NWO/WCW differences aside to see if I was okay. I told them, 'Do what you have to for *Thunder,* then come to the hospital.'"

Thanks to his "buff stuff," Bagwell's career is not over. Because he is in such tremendous shape, doctors say he will be able to wrestle again. Although he has lost 20 pounds, Buff is already working on his legs and anticipates doing full-body workouts in three months. His return to active wrestling should happen within nine to 12 months. Bagwell says his "go-getter" mentality, plus the advice of Dean Malenko and Ric Flair, both of whom have overcome neck injuries, will make rehab easier. But if things do get too rough, he knows where he can turn.

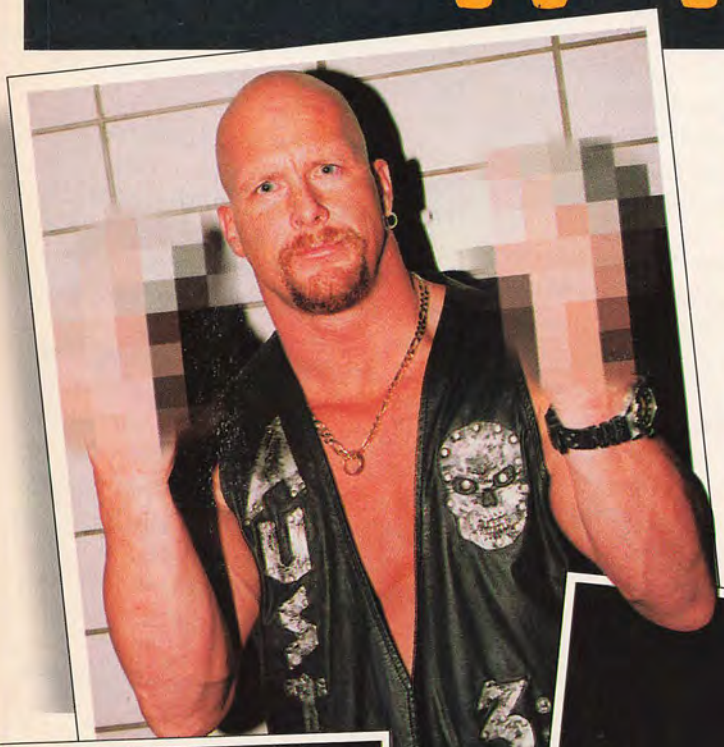
"I believe God lets things happen for a reason," Bagwell reasoned. "I never cried or asked why. I think it was His way of warning me that He could take it all away at any time. I live a good life, but I was lacking in a few things."

Everyone is confident that Bagwell will make a thorough recovery, especially his boss, Eric Bischoff. "Before they took me to the hospital," Buff remembered, "Eric said, 'You know you're going be all right, don't you?' I said, 'How do you know?' He told me, 'Because I always get what I pray for.'"

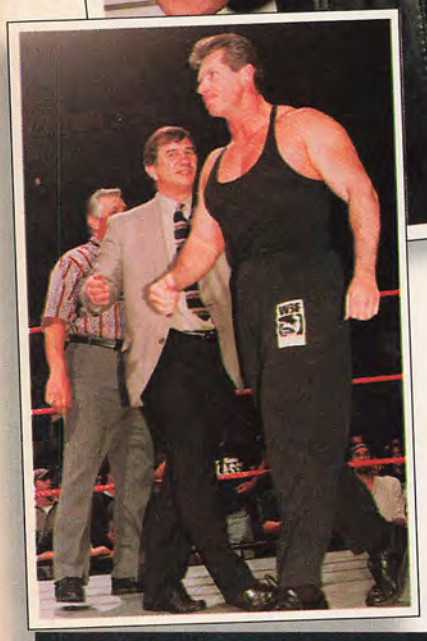
For once, let's hope Bischoff is right. □

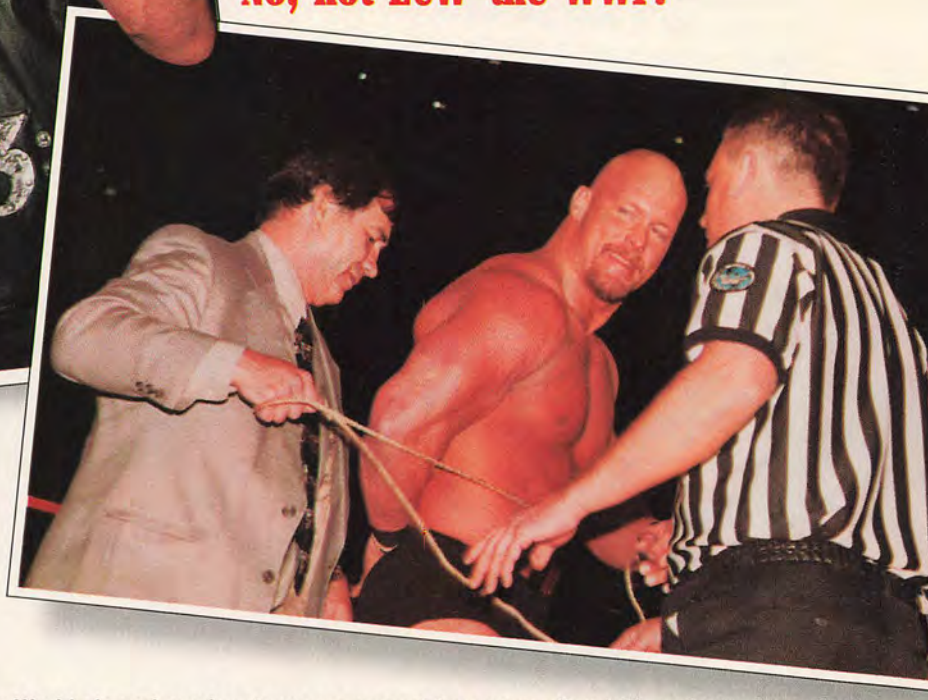


THE CONTROVERSIAL (AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL) WWF



No one speaks louder than wrestling fans. Since the major promotions are catering to them like never before, we decided to gauge their opinions on the most controversial and raucous federation going today. No, not ECW–the WWF!





With a World champion who shows no respect for anyone (top left), and who "wrestles" with one arm tied behind his back (above) against *his boss*, Vince McMahon (left), the WWF is more controversial than ever before!

50 FANS SPEAK OUT!

JUST WHEN YOU count the WWF out, it starts to gain an advantage in the all-important ratings "war." It is raising the stakes in the long-standing battle for promotional supremacy by becoming edgier than ever before. But is there a long-term cost for short-term gain?

We went to the masses to gauge the word on the street on the "new" WWF. We called subscribers and went face-to-face with wrestling fans. What follows is how 50 fans feel about the most controversial wrestling organization today ... ranging from the good to the bad to the downright ugly.

1. "I love it. Vince is kicking butt and taking names like he should have a long time ago!" —John Carlisle, Champaign, IL, age 18

2. "Vince Sr. must be rolling in his grave. Jess, too!" —Gerald Maggard, Roanoke, VA, age 47

3. "War is hell, and the WWF is doing what they have to do. Plus, it's working." —Lyle Plowman, Bismarck, ND, age 23

4. "One minute, they're trying to be more reality-based. The next minute, Paul Bearer is claiming to be Kane's father. I'm not sure I like where things are going." —Judy Grossman, Austin, TX, age 19

5. "I enjoy the new WWF, but now I have to send my kids out of the room when I watch it." —Sheryl Lee Becker, Butte, MT, age 34

6. "Bischoff fears McMahon because McMahon is making the WWF number one again! I love it!" —Curt Kelzenberg, Harrisburg, PA, age 16

7. "I think this new attitude will bring in an audience, but it won't hold them much longer." —Bill Bogart, Muncie, IN, age 24

8. "I like that they are more open about a wrestler's past, but they still have goofy characters like The Edge." —Lanette McConnell, San Francisco, CA, age 22

9. "No one in the WWF respects authority, because the authority is not worthy of respect." —Dee Madsen, Miami, FL, age 29

10. "I think they are turning the corner by getting guys like X-Pac, but I don't like what DX is doing." — Dennis Boie, Reno, NV, age 20

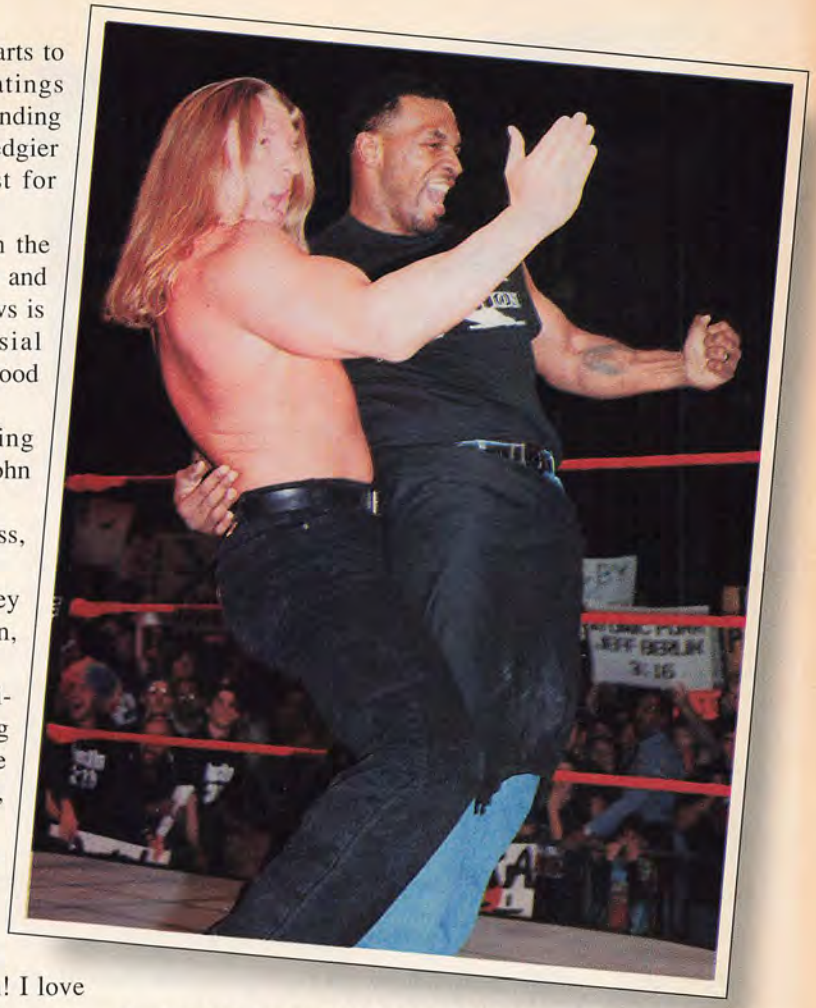
11. "If they really want to stay competitive, they don't need the lewd stuff. They just need to do a live show every Monday." —Scott Pengelly, Schenectady, NY, age 31

12. "I think the WWF is becoming more popular. I see more WWF T-shirts than WCW in my school." —Shawn Moynihan, Washington, D.C., age 16

13. "As long as DX is ruling the WWF, Vince has nothing to worry about." —Angela Weringa, Oklahoma City, OK, age 12

14. "More Dude Love!" —Patty Lebins, Seattle, WA, age 15

15. "I see the WWF as an immoral place containing wrestlers with no dignity or tact. I won't watch their shows as long as Steve Austin and DeGeneration X are allowed to do and say whatever they want." —Darrell Hayranes, Phoenix, AZ, age 27



Mike Tyson and Hunter Hearst Helmsley know how to stir things up ... both in the ring and in the fans' emotions.

16. "Vince has created a place where the big names he lost would not even fit in anymore." —Douglas Dahlen, Baton Rouge, LA, age 32

17. "WCW has men. The WWF has immature boys who curse and act like jerks." —Sandy Manning, Texarkana, TX, age 14

18. "Two full hours of 'Triple-H' would keep me watching." —Dawn Hanson, Sioux City, IA, age 12

19. "They all should just wrestle more and keep their mouths closed." —Michael Smaby, Chicago, IL, age 19

20. "I truly thought that the WWF would always be relegated to second place, but Vince is at his best with his back against the wall." —Jason O'Connell, Bloomington, IN, age 29

21. "If you keep the NWA out of the mix, the WWF is showing how progressive they can be." —Terry Finer, St. Paul, MN, age 38

22. "Vince's feud with Austin, while it brings in ratings, shows how he may fear success in the long run." —Katy Westby, Grand Forks, ND, age 21

23. "Vince seems to now have more respect for

The women of the WWF, such as Sable and Luna, have made their controversial mark on the sport, too. A lot of fans object to some of things they do ... and some of the things they do and don't wear!

wrestling history. He should respect his champion as much." —Craig Milberg, Racine, WI, age 49

24. "They suck, and that's the bottom line." —Monica Bengoivanni, New York, NY, age 25

25. "They are holding my interest for longer periods of time, but sometimes they force me to change the channel when it gets lewd." —Michael Miley, Philadelphia, PA, age 42

26. "I hate to admit it, but I love it. It beats the old days. I even have my own DX T-shirt." —Manfred Beckman, Scranton, PA, age 51

27. "They have gotten so far away from actual wrestling that I think they should lose the word 'wrestling' from their name." —George Monson, Wilmington, DE, age 44

28. "I'm more of a closet WWF fan. My friends prefer WCW. I think there are many people like me out there." —Wanda Ortiz, Boston, MA, age 17

29. "With wrestlers like Val Venis, the WWF may have to move to the Spice Channel." —Mark Jewitt, Kansas City, KS, age 18

30. "They have all this action, but no big names to back it all up. Give me WCW any day of the week." —Marnie Pedersen, Minneapolis, MN, age 13

31. "They may reposition themselves at number one again, but do the ends justify the means?" —Donald Hetherington, Natick, MA, age 26

32. "This is wrestling. If people want a kid's show, they should turn to PBS or Nickelodeon." —Sheryl Beam, Sioux Falls, SD, age 23

33. "Wrestling has returned to being the 'in' thing again. That's all I care about." —Russell Hamann, Charlotte, NC, age 36

34. "The WWF has lost interest in their core audience through what they are showing week after week." —Muriel Samson, Las Vegas, NV, age 30

35. "This is all ECW's fault. Now the WWF is copying a promotion that is less successful. What's up with that?" —Kim Pranke, Little Rock, AR, age 19

36. "The WWF needs to move *Raw* to Tuesday for their fans." —Tony Sharek, Albany, NY, age 20

37. "They reflect real life for me. People fight and curse at each other, including bosses and employees." —Stacia Grossman, Silver Springs, MD, age 16

38. "When a foul-mouthed idiot like Steve Austin can get to the top, I lose faith in wrestling." —David Korman, Knoxville, TN, age 51

39. "Times change. The WWF has changed with them." —Tom Hoey, Lexington, KY, age 33

40. "If people don't like the controversy, they can always change the channel." —Maxwell Kjerland, Duluth, MN, age 25

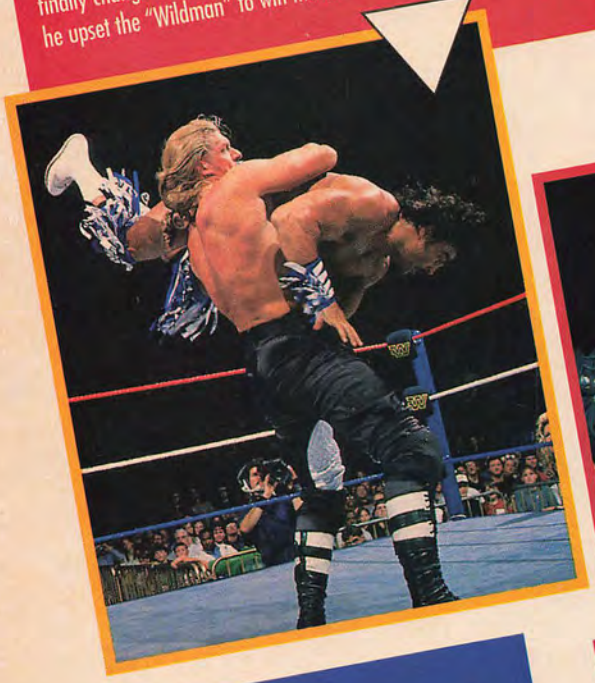
41. "I have to sneak over to my friend's to watch it." —Ross Longo, Lima, OH, age 9

42. "I'd rather watch rising stars in the WWF than old fossils in WCW. Who cares what they do or

(Continued on page 47)

GREATEST MATCH

vs. Marc Mero, October 21, 1996. Expectations were very high for Helmsley when he arrived in the WWF in mid-1995. He was young, he was taught well by Killer Kowalski, and he had no glaring weaknesses as a wrestler. But his first year-plus in the WWF was a struggle, as he endured several miserable slumps. His luck finally changed when, thanks in part to Curt Hennig's interference, he upset the "Wildman" to win the Intercontinental title.



MOST HATED OPPONENT

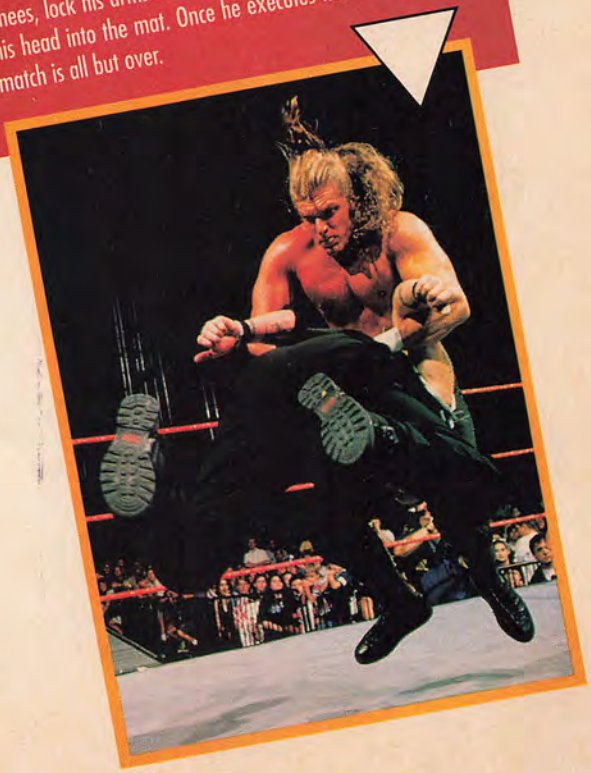
Owen Hart. For months, DeGeneration X focused all its energy on trying to eliminate Bret Hart from the WWF. Owen became one of its primary targets once the "Hitman" left for WCW. Helmsley has insulted him time after time and wrestled him time after time, and though he has gotten the better of Owen, Owen refuses to go away. Perhaps what Hunter hates most about him is his persistence.

TOUGHEST OPPONENT

Steve Austin. Helmsley can talk all he wants about how Shawn Michaels' willingness to trust Mike Tyson and invite him into DeGeneration X cost the group the WWF title. Fact is, "Triple-H" has had numerous shots at the World title since then, but no matter what his strategy is, he just can't find a way to beat "Stone-Cold." A lot of other wrestlers can say the same.

FAVORITE MANEUVER

The "Pedigree." What's most impressive about "Triple-H's" finisher of choice is how quickly he can execute it. He need only have his opponent momentarily stunned to set it up. With the opponent facing him, he'll put the man's head between his knees, lock his arms behind his back, then jump up and ram his head into the mat. Once he executes the "Pedigree," the match is all but over.



PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED
HUNTER HEARST HELMSLEY
DX-traordinary!

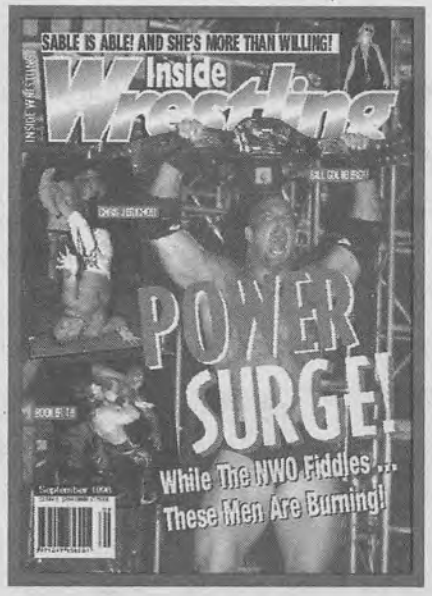
close-up:

HUNTER HEARST HELMSLEY

WWF EUROPEAN CHAMP Hunter Hearst Helmsley checks in at 6'5", 279 pounds … The native of Boston watched tons of wrestling as a kid and always had his eye on a future in the sport … Trained with fellow bodybuilder Ted Arcidi, who also was a wrestler … Was obsessed with building the perfect physique … Won several regional bodybuilding competitions and was later introduced to legendary rulebreaker Killer Kowalski, who runs a wrestling school in Malden, Massachusetts … Kowalski liked what he saw and started training Helmsley … Credits Kowalski with giving him the swagger he needed to succeed … Kowalski taught Helmsley an inverted variation of Wahoo McDaniel's Indian deathlock leglock … Began his career as Terra Ryzing and defeated Tony Roy in his pro debut in March 1992 in the Massachusetts-based International Wrestling Federation … Four months later, he got his first title shot and beat IWF heavyweight champ Mad Dog Richard … Kept piling up victories and gained the attention of WCW talent scouts … Was invited to Atlanta for a tryout in early-1994 … Battled Keith Cole on February 1, 1994, at Center Stage Theater and beat him using that inverted Indian deathlock … In one of his first major tests, lost to Johnny B. Badd (Marc Mero) on May 19 … Changed his name to Jean-Paul LeVeque later that month … Received a shot at the WCW TV title on June 2 in Gainesville, Georgia, and battled Larry Zbyszko to a double-countout … Wrestled on his first pay-per-view at Starrcade '94 on December 27 and was pinned by Alex Wright, who was also making his PPV debut, in 14:01 … Left WCW and took some time off during the first half of 1995 … After signing with the WWF, he once again changed his name, this time to Helmsley, a rich blue blood snob from Greenwich, Connecticut … Introduced his new power move, the "Pedigree," a variation of the piledriver … Ran off a string of victories against low- and mid-level competition, including Bob Holly, Mike Bell, Doink, and Duke Droese … Lost to Bret Hart by countout on August 11, 1995, in New Haven, Connecticut … A familiar pattern was developing: Helmsley was defeating inferior competition, but losing all his possible breakthrough matches … Defeated Holly at SummerSlam '95 … Defeated Fatu at In Your House IV on October 22, 1995 … Scored several victories over Henry Godwinn, to whom he had lost earlier in the year … For the first time since entering a major federation in early-'94, Helmsley appeared to be making significant progress … Culminated his feud with Godwinn at In Your House V by winning an Arkansas hogpen match … Beat Intercontinental champ Razor Ramon (Scott Hall) by DQ on January 14, 1996 … Pinned Droese at the 1996 Royal Rumble. The decision was reversed when WWF President Gorilla Monsoon saw that Helmsley had used a foreign object. It was a critical loss, because the winner got to enter the Rumble last, while the loser had to enter first … But the loss was a victory for Helmsley: Despite being the first man to enter the Rumble, Helmsley lasted longer than anyone else (48:01) before being tossed out. Now people were noticing Helmsley for something besides his snobby 'tude … Suffered the most humiliating loss of his career at WrestleMania XII: a crushing defeat to The Ultimate Warrior in which Warrior charged the ring, unleashed an all-out assault, and pinned Helmsley in only 1:38 … Helmsley had brought Sable to the ring for the match and blamed her for the loss. Marc Mero made his first WWF appearance and saved Sable from further humiliation … The next night, Mero again saved Sable from Helmsley, and she joined his side … Kept losing to Michaels and Bret Hart … Pinned Mero in a dark match at In Your House VII, then returned later in the evening and interfered in Mero's match against The Kid (now X-Pac), causing Kid to get DQ'd … Pinned Ramon at Madison Square Garden on May 19, 1996 (Ramon's last WWF match) … Lost just about every match in his feud with Mero and fell out of the WWF ratings … Lost to Sid Vicious in the quarterfinals of a tournament for the vacant Intercontinental title … Curt Hennig, who had been out of action for three years, suggested that Helmsley was distracted by the women he brought to the ring with him … Hennig would come to the ring during Helmsley's matches, whisper something in the ear of whichever lady Helmsley had stationed at ringside, and escort her away before Helmsley could do anything about it … Hennig claimed he was doing it for Helmsley's own good; Helmsley thought otherwise … Tried handcuffing one of his lady friends to a ringpost before his September 23, 1996, match against Freddie Joe Floyd (Tracey Smothers), but Hennig obtained a key and freed her. Helmsley left the ring to confront him and Hennig punched him … Helmsley challenged Hennig and called him a "has-been" … Hennig accepted the challenge and agreed to wrestle Helmsley, but the match never happened, as on the night in question, Hunter attacked Hennig in a hallway and injured his knee … Was pinned by Steve Austin at In Your House XI on October 20, 1996 … But the next night, Helmsley finally scored a win over Mero, and it was a big one: He pinned him for the Intercontinental title after Hennig hit Mero, who had thought Hennig was on his side … Propositioned Marlena, Goldust's woman, before In Your House XII … Lost to Mero that night when an angry Goldust interfered … Later in the card, he interfered in the Austin-Goldust match and attacked both men … Stole Marlena during Goldust's match against Jerry Lawler at the December 30, 1996, *Raw* … Pinned Goldust at the 1997 Royal Rumble. Later that evening, he got eliminated by Goldust in the Rumble … Lost the belt on February 13, 1997, in Lowell, Massachusetts, when he was upset by Rocky Maivia … Helmsley claimed it was a fluke, but Maivia repeated the victory three nights later at In Your House XIII … Introduced Chyna, his muscular new bodyguard, at WrestleMania XIII and defeated Goldust … Became the 1997 King of the Ring by defeating Mankind in the finals. Chyna played a major part in the victory: She interfered in his semifinal win over Ahmed Johnson and in the finals … Battled to a violent double-disqualification with Mankind at In Your House XIV that included the usual interference by Chyna … Lost to Mankind in a cage match at SummerSlam … When Shawn Michaels' part in Bret Hart's World title victory at SummerSlam '97 turned Michaels into a rulebreaker, Helmsley aligned himself with Michaels … He and Shawn formed a group called DeGeneration X after Bret kept calling them degenerates … Won his first European title when Michaels laid down for him on December 11 in Lowell, Massachusetts, and purposely lost … Helmsley and Chyna caused Owen Hart's elimination from the 1998 Royal Rumble … Strange event: Goldust, disguised as Helmsley, lost the European title to Owen on January 20, 1998, and WWF Commissioner Sgt. Slaughter allowed the decision to stand … Michaels, Helmsley, and The New Age Outlaws joined forces to pummel Austin and Owen at the February 2, 1998, *Raw Is War* … The Outlaws would join DX in March … Beat Owen in an impromptu match for the European title on March 16, 1998, in Phoenix … Slaughter tried to prevent Chyna from interfering in Helmsley's match against Owen at WrestleMania XIV by handcuffing himself to her at ringside. But Chyna interfered anyway and Helmsley pinned Owen to retain the belt … First signs of dissension in DeGeneration X: Helmsley ripped Michaels for allowing Mike Tyson into DX (Tyson was the special enforcer in Michaels' World title loss to Steve Austin at WrestleMania) … Helmsley declared himself the new leader of DX … Even Chyna's interference couldn't help Helmsley in multiple losses to Austin … Still, Helmsley has come a long way over the past four years … With his confidence soaring and his talent level at a peak, he could go all the way to the top. □

this month in...

Inside Wrestling

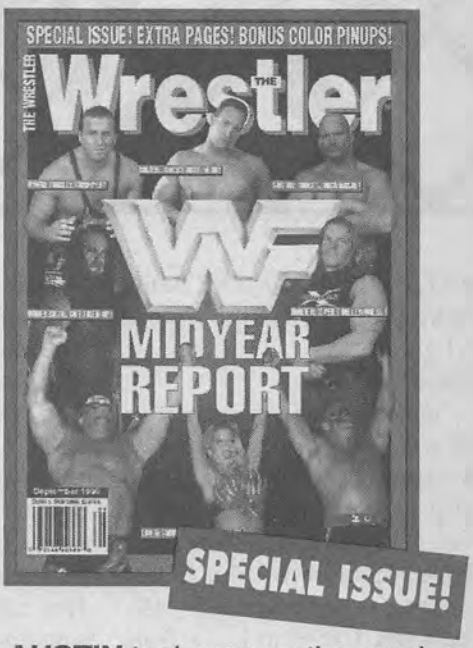


And so the NWO squabbles continue. Who's on **HOLLYWOOD HOGAN's** side? Who's with **KEVIN NASH** and **RANDY SAVAGE**? Guys like **BILL GOLDBERG**, **BOOKER T**, and **CHRIS JERICHO** don't care. While the NWO fiddles, they're burning! ... What do we mean when we say **SABLE** is able, and she's more than willing?! You'll have to read the story to find out ... Why did **OWEN HART** form an alliance with **THE NATION OF DOMINATION**? Does he even know? All that is certain is that he is a frustrated and confused man. **DeGENERATION X** is taking all the credit for that. They claim to own Owen's mind!

All this—and much more—
in the September 1998 issue of
Inside Wrestling

NOW ON SALE!

The Wrestler



STEVE AUSTIN took over as the number-one star in the federation, **DeGENERATION X** got as lewd as it wanted to be, **SABLE** and **SUNNY** again proved there's more to them than their pretty faces and gorgeous bodies, and even **MIKE TYSON** stopped by for a while. We'll review the good, the bad, and everything in between in our WWF Midyear Report ... **KEVIN NASH** and **HOLLYWOOD HOGAN** are on the verge of a full-scale war. We'll tell you the real story as to why these two never "Kliqued" ... Get ready: A **BILL GOLDBERG-GIANT** match might be coming very soon to an arena near you!

All this—and much more—
in the September 1998 issue of
The Wrestler

NOW ON SALE!

WHAT'S IN A ...? The name stood out like, well, like a sore thumb, I guess.

Jerkface.

No, I'm not calling you names.

He's a wrestler in the House of Pain Wrestling Federation. I have no idea what he looks like, and I have never seen him wrestle. We don't even have a picture of him in our files. I have never heard him talk, but I know all I need to know from his offbeat name.

Jerkface.

Now, make no mistake, there are some people in this world with some pretty ridiculous names. Obviously, their parents didn't consider the consequences when naming time came. I'm sure you've heard the most common examples.

Jerkface? No way. Unless his parents were complete idiots. Obviously, Jerkface is a pseudonym. But what person in his right mind would advertise himself as a jerkface? It's a cheap attempt at attracting our attention. A very cheap attempt at attracting our attention.

It worked.

Jerkface. The Overweight Lover. Frankie Frank. Chip Fairway. Woody Woodchuck.

Question: How much wood does a Woody Woodchuck chuck?

These people, with their ridiculous names, are all appealing to wrestling's lowest element.

I call them fans without brains.

There are a lot of them out there. You can find them at WWF and WCW cards. You can find them at ECW cards, too. They're the ones screaming for Beulah or Francine to touch them. You can find them at independent cards. Basically, wrestling fans run the intellectual gamut from genius to idiot, and beyond. Same for other sports, too.

Subcategory: *PWI* columnists without brains.

Jerkface.

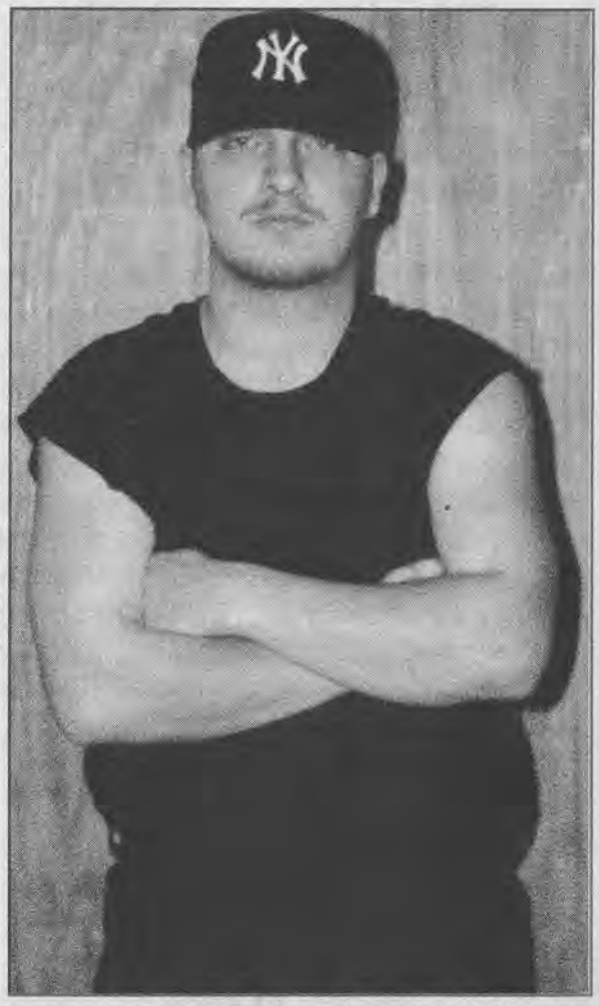
"It's very interesting," said renowned wrestling psychologist Dr. Sidney M. Basil. "This man has basically changed his entire identity all for the sake of a brief joke that figures to get him attention for all the wrong reasons. On the other hand, here you are, a respected wrestling journalist, writing an entire column about this man's offbeat name, so obviously he has accomplished his goal. What other wrestlers and managers in House of Pain have you written about?"

Good point. Still, this practice of taking on a ridiculous name just to attract attention, which happens quite often in professional wrestling, casts a sad light on the sport. I've written about these names before, but when I see Jerkface, it kind of makes me angry.

Jerkface has to be a dirtbag.

Maybe it shouldn't make me angry. After all, I'm a *Beavis And Butt-Head* fan. But it's one thing to laugh at cartoon characters and another to laugh at real people. Jerkface sounds like the punch line in a conversation between Beavis and Butt-head.

You have to admire wrestlers who don't resort to cheap gimmicks



What does Jerkface's mother tell her friends when she finds herself engaged in a discussion about children? "My son's a professional wrestler." "Oh, what's his name?" "Jerkface."

The very reckless Reckless Youth uses a moonsault on Julio Sanchez. Obviously, this man's name is not really Reckless Youth, but at least the wrestling name he uses does fit.

and names to get ahead: Bret Hart. Ken Shamrock. Dan Severn. Chris Benoit. Bill Goldberg.

Sure, colorful names are a part of wrestling. Some are fitting. Reckless Youth, for example. He's young and uses an exciting, high-risk style. Simple, very easy to understand. Same for The Mad Russian. The guy is from Russia, and he's never in a good mood.

But seriously ... "Big" Dick Dudley? The Metal Maniac? Cueball Carmichael? Syl the Sadist (who on a recent Northern Championship Wrestling card defeated Marc the Grizzly, who's a man, not a bear)? Suicide Kid?

"People in show business have been giving themselves colorful names for decades, and wrestling obviously has its show business aspects," said Dr. Basil. "For the most part, I find that people who give themselves unusual names don't have confidence in themselves. They think they have to hide behind a different identity or persona, and they are hesitant to reveal their true selves in fear that it won't be good enough."

Okay, but I don't believe that any major federation would sign Jerkface, and that's because of his name. WCW or the WWF would probably make him change his name. When you get right down to it, names don't mean much in wrestling. Sure, colorful names are a part of wrestling's colorful history, but check out the names of wrestling's champions, past and present.

Hulk Hogan. Colorful. Like a comic book superhero. Very effective.

Ric Flair. Colorful. Stylish. The name is tasteful and it suits the man.

Bret Hart. His real name.

Sting. Obviously not his real name. And, in a way, the name Sting keeps us from ever knowing very much about the man. "By calling himself Sting, he is sending us a message," Dr. Basil said. "The message is, I am mysterious, and I choose to be that way. I don't want to reveal anything about my personal life, including my real name."

Think about it: How much do you know about the outside-the-ring Sting? Very little. There have been very few character pieces written about Sting. We know Hogan is married and has children. We know Ric Flair is married. We've seen his wife and children on TV.

How about Sting? He doesn't want us to know.

Bruno Sammartino. Ordinary name.

Ivan Koloff. Perfect name for a Russian.

Yokozuna. It's a sumo wrestling name.

How about Diesel/Kevin Nash and Razor Ramon/Scott Hall? Hall's career was stalling during his last year in the WWF as Ramon. When he went to WCW, he couldn't use the Razor Ramon moniker, so he went back to being Scott Hall. Fortunately for Hall, by then he no longer needed the Razor Ramon disguise. Diesel, too, is getting along fine as Kevin Nash, but he needed the jump-start Diesel gave him.

Fortunately, however, talent always wins out. A name can't change what is. Ability can't be disguised.

Jerkface, indeed. □

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win or lose or draw

By Andy Rodriguez

OBVIOUSLY, SABLE HAS no business being in the ring against Marc Mero. She admitted that herself just before their May 11 confrontation at *Raw Is War* when she told Mero she was surprised he had allowed it to go that far.

Mero admitted it, too, sort of, by putting Sable across his shoulders and warning her that had he chosen to do so, he really could have seriously hurt her. Sable's response was to kick Mero in the groin and give him a power bomb.

It was impressive, but had I been in Sable's place, it wouldn't have been my response. My response would have been this:

Mero, you'll never be a world champion. In fact, I don't think you'll ever the champion of anything again.

Sure, Mero's a fine wrestler, certainly one skilled enough to capture the WWF championship from Steve Austin if he was at his best. With his actions regarding Sable, however, Mero has demonstrated that he doesn't have the integrity to warrant being called a champion.

A man with integrity would have been more concerned with finding quality opponents than making his valet look bad. Yes, Sable's done a lot too provoke him, but it would have been very easy for him to walk away and say, "I have better things to do with my time. Our relationship is over. Let's move on."

Instead, Mero persisted with the charade. He goaded Sable into challenging him to more than a battle of words. Almost no one actually expected them to wrestle, but there remained the potential for Mero to get hurt seriously. Sable's a tough lady, and she's in very good shape, but she is no professional wrestler.

It turned out that Mero had no intention of wrestling her, but that shouldn't absolve him. He was hanging out the threat of physical harm, and that's bad enough. He placed Sable in danger. In doing so, he placed his career in danger. The danger is that a lot of people now will have a hard time taking Mero seriously.

"He never should have put himself in that position," said Ken Shamrock. "He should have just said to Sable, 'Let's forget all this nonsense.' Instead, he kept it all going. And where has it gotten him? He's not much closer to a title shot."

Maybe he is. A lot of folks around the WWF are saying that Mero *could be* one of the top contenders to Austin's title. Well, Dude Love also was a top contender for the World title. Again, a great wrestler, but a man I'd have a difficult time taking seriously if he weren't in cahoots with Vince McMahon.

But will Mero care about being taken seriously if he wins the belt?

(Continued on page 44)

Marc Mero couldn't wait to have that public confrontation with Sable at the May 11 edition of *Raw*. Andy Rodriguez thinks he'd be better off forgetting all about her.

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win, lose, or draw

(Continued from page 42)

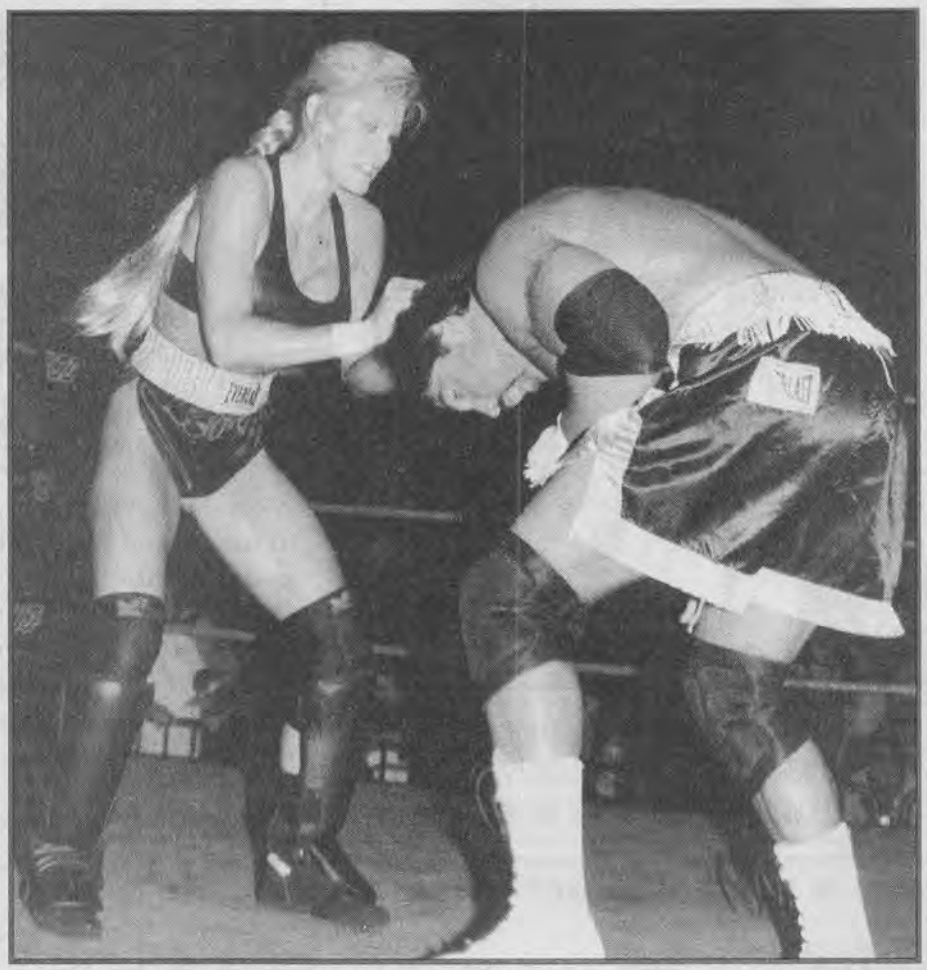
"Look, in this business, the belt's the thing," said Jim Cornette. "You have it and nothing else matters. You have that and they have to take you seriously."

For Mero, there's probably something more. Remember, the man was a boxer before he entered the ring as a wrestler.

"He didn't do a lot of fooling around in those days," recalled Bob Hazin, a Golden Gloves official who saw Mero compete. "He was all business. I realize how different pro wrestling is from amateur boxing, but from knowing Mero in those days, and seeing him wrestle now, I doubt his attitude has changed much."

That is, his attitude once the bell rings. Before the match starts, he's doing things like devising ways to embarrass Sable.

"To tell you the truth, I'm having a good time watching this whole thing with Mero and Sable," said WWF commentator Jerry Lawler, "but I think Marc should put a stop to this ASAP. It's a sideshow. He didn't get into this business to participate in a sideshow. He's here to win championships. You don't do that by getting kicked below the belt by women."



After kicking Mero in the groin, Sable set him up for a power bomb. Rodriguez insists Mero has little to gain by feuding with her ... other than getting some cheap publicity.

For Mero, it's a dead end. If he hurts Sable, he's the ultimate bully. If he gets hurt by her, he's the ultimate wimp. Still, he may have a hard time getting out.

"Sable is really intent on not letting Mero get off the hook," said Tom Brandi, who feuded with Mero a few months ago. "She's going to make him pay, and she'll do whatever she has to. It might be another power bomb or something worse. If I were him, I'd be worried."

"I honestly don't think he's ready to end it," Lawler said. "First of all, he really is ticked off at her. And second, look at all the attention he's getting. This puts him in the spotlight. Maybe not in the best light, but he's out there. He's got me talking about him, doesn't he?"

At least Mero is fortunate in this sense: There are plenty of wrestlers to target in the WWF, plenty of good feuds waiting for him. Should he grow tired of trading insults with Sable, he can blindside someone and start a war that reminds people what a strong competitor he is.

Unfortunately, he seems obsessed with squaring things with Sable, and, publicity or not, it is to the detriment of his career.

In the short run, maybe not. Maybe it will lead Mero to that coveted WWF championship and we'll all forget about this silly escapade.

In the long run, though, the feud is painting a picture of the man Mero is, or at least of the man he has become. We see an athlete attempting to degrade others in order to prove a point. And in doing so, he degrades himself.

That's not how a true champion should conduct himself. But remember, Mero used to be known as Johnny B. Badd. Maybe now the name fits him better. □

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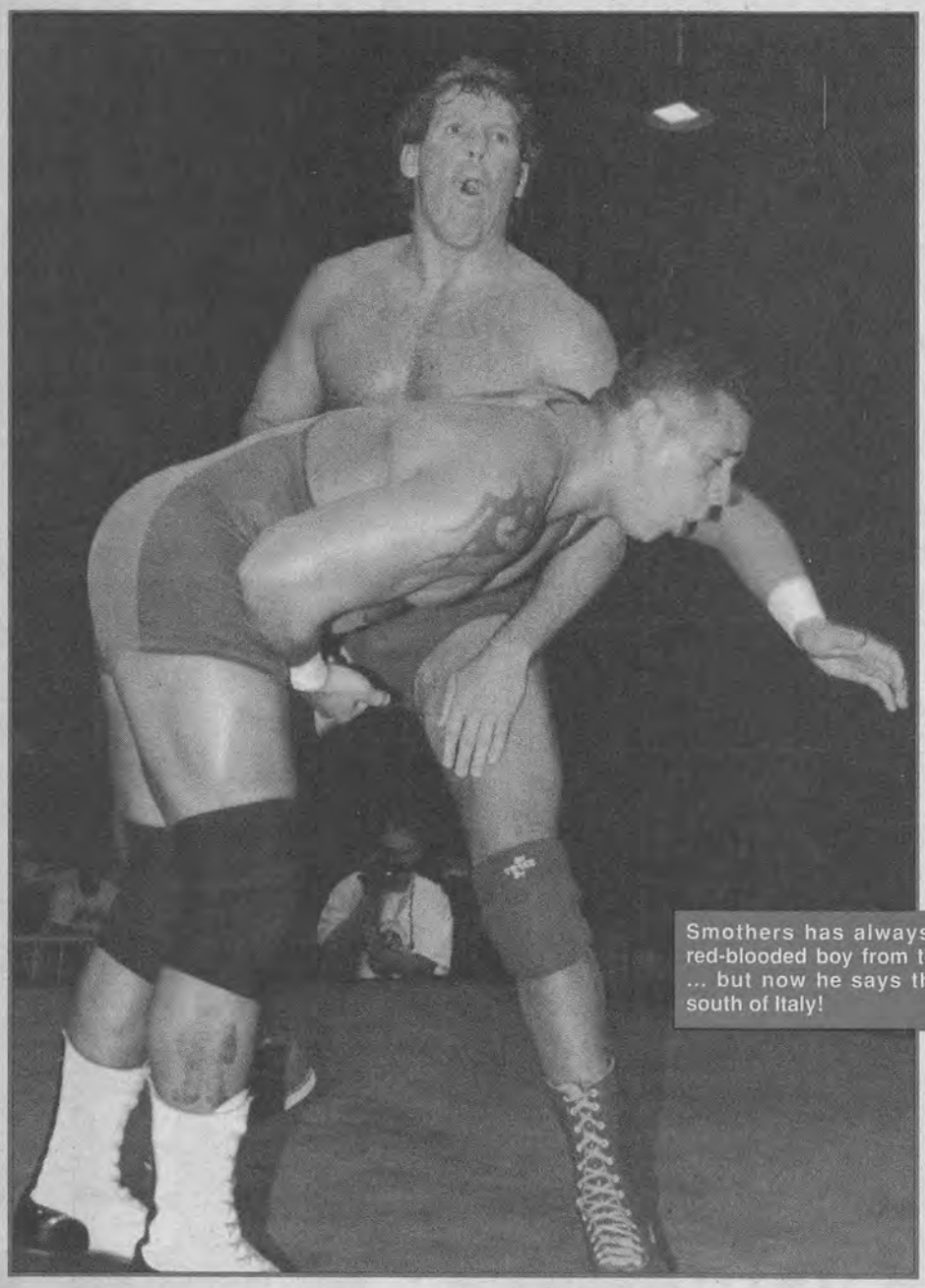


Smothers has always been a red-blooded boy from the South ... but now he says that's the south of Italy!

and we're gonna be the champions again. Whuh-choo laughin' about? I oughta slap you face!"

Rich's command of stereotypical Italian-American mannerisms is, to say the least, laughable. Asked to point out Little Atlanta, Italy, on a map of Italy, Rich stammered, "You got the wrong a kind of map."

Smothers, who used to drape his body in Confederate garb, demanded, "Whut? A man's not allowed to rediscover his roots?"

Columbus, a full-blooded Italian, discovered America.

Smothers and Rich have rediscovered cities in Italy.

"Hey," Rich said. "Turnabout is fair play."

It's one of the weirdest gimmicks in wrestling history. Even ECW fans, who will usually go along with just about anything, are having trouble dealing with the idea of Smothers and Rich as full-blooded Italians. Little Guido? Maybe. He really is an Italian from Howard Beach. Smothers and Rich? No way.

The thing is, the FBI have been successful. They are, as Rich pointed out, former ECW tag champions who beat Buh Buh Ray and D-Von Dudley—another occasionally laughable group—for the belts. They're currently feuding with Super Nova and The Blue Meanie and faring reasonably well. With Rich, a knowledgeable former champion, guiding them along, the FBI have the potential to be an outstanding team. After all, Smothers is a fine wrestler and Guido was a talented amateur.

But they are so distracted by their ridiculous gimmick that they lose far more often than they win. And the fans and media can't take them seriously because this whole Full-Blooded Italians thing is completely laughable.

The FBI bicker amongst themselves and constantly threaten to break up, supposedly like a real Italian family. Of course, they never actually break up, because in a true Italian family, blood is much thicker than water. Besides, you never turn your back on your brother. Or your mother. Or The Big Don.

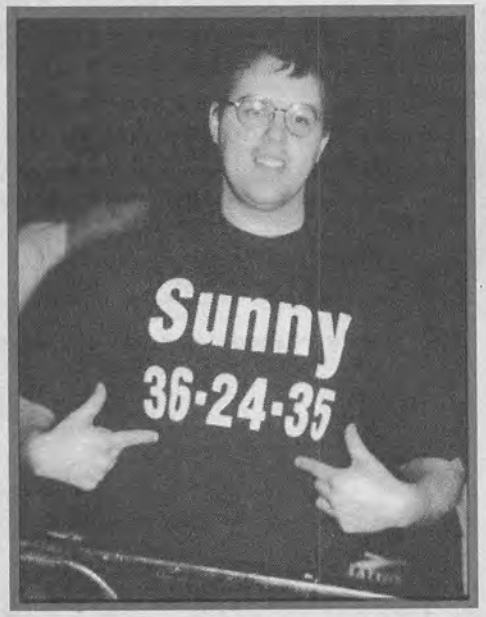
"Tommy Rich threw a big barbecue before Wrestlepalooza," ECW broadcaster Joey Styles said. "It was the first time I ever saw Italian *and* Confederate flags flying in front of a house."

Probably not the last time. The FBI is here to stay. They want your respect.

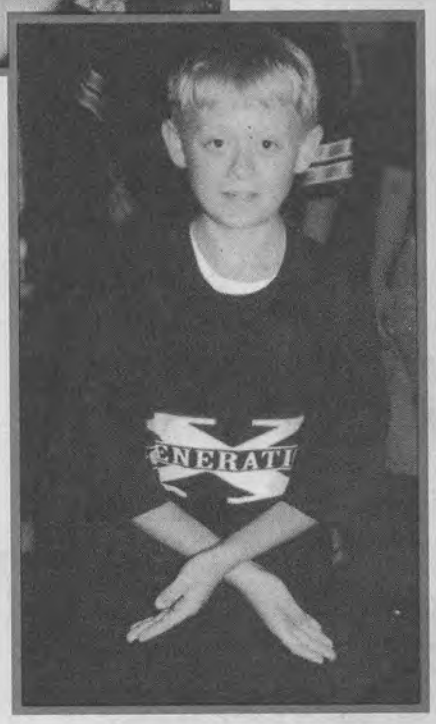
And if you don't respect them ... then shuttupa you face!

Got that? □

(Continued from page 34)



It doesn't take a genius to figure out the primary reason some *male* fans attend WWF shows (far left and left). You have to wonder, though, how many parents approve when they see their children paying tribute to DX (below).



say?" —Cort Willemson, Atlanta, GA, age 12

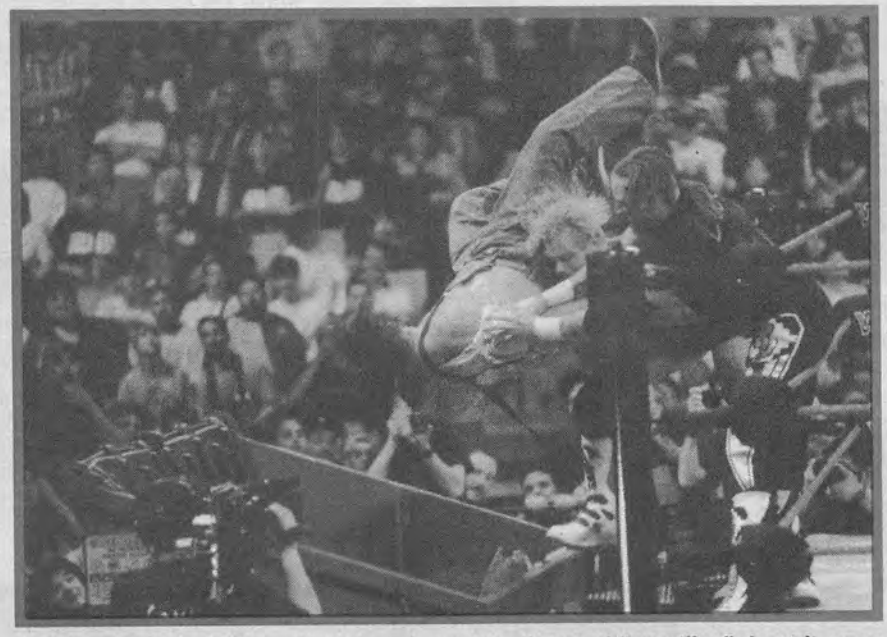
43. "I can't imagine anyone looking back on this as the 'good old days' of wrestling." —Fred Armstrong, Los Angeles, CA, age 60

44. "It certainly doesn't put me to sleep. I watch *Raw* just to see what will happen next." —Mike Wellstone, Columbia, SC, age 26

45. "There is little sport and even less entertainment for me." —Peter Temple, St. Louis, MO, age 37

46. "While I don't think athletes should be role models, the WWF stars take that to a new extreme. The stuff they do shouldn't be on TV until like 11 at night!" —Todd Mueller, Tempe, AZ, age 42

47. "More Sable! More Luna!" —Dan Trustad, Santa Fe, NM, age 18



Go ahead and throw Terry Funk in a dumpster—the word "wrestling" doesn't mean much in the WWF anymore!

48. "I'd rather watch ECW. They are the real deal in my book." —Wally Somers, LaCrosse, WI, age 31

49. "I feel like I am an important part of the audience with some of the new wrestlers they are bringing in." —Coralie Zadra, Olympia, WA, age 15

50. "I love that DX is 'invading' WCW. The NWO wouldn't have the guts to do something like that." —Tara Goodwin, Philadelphia, PA, age 11 □

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(Continued from page 5)

ECW policy doesn't change, I will have to think twice about renewing my subscription.

GARRETT ORBAN
White Haven, PA

SAY WHAT?

I think the 1998 "*PWI* Poll's" 50 questions were fine, but it seems to me that the 171 people who voted are complete morons who shouldn't be in the wrestling business. Judging by the winners, I'd say that *PWI* must have sent all the ballots to people in WCW or people who have friends in WCW. Next year, how about sending some ballots to the WWF and maybe one to me? At least I would think before answering it. There was one thing I liked about the 1998 "*PWI* Poll": the end.

JEFF BEREKSAZI
Tarentum, PA

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

I am one of those American fans who doesn't get to see foreign wrestling very often, but the little Japanese wrestling that I have seen amazes me. I'm not talking about New Japan or All-Japan, but the lesser-known promotions like IWA and FMW. These federations produce some of the most incredible matches and reckless stars.

At ECW's Living Dangerously, fans got to see a match that included Masato Tanaka, a fantastic FMW athlete. Other Oriental promotions like WAR and Michinoku Pro combine different elements of international wrestling. Lucha Libre action and "garbage" matches merge together to create awesome wrestling. Unfortunately, few U.S. magazines ever mention these brilliant promotions. I think fans would react positively to a section on these independent leagues in the future.

JOHN CLAPP
Torrington, CT

*[Editor's note: Please check out our reports from Japan and Mexico on pages 62 and 63. These reports are now a monthly feature in **PWI**.]*

EVEN *MORE* ECW, PLEASE!

Why isn't ECW on prime time Monday night TV? I'm sick and tired of seeing WCW and the WWF every Monday night, month after month. Unless I have a satellite or live in Philadelphia, I can only see ECW about four times a year on pay-per-view. If ECW really wants to make a name for itself, it needs to get national television.

I know that ECW and the WWF often allow wrestlers from each company to appear on each other's shows. Why doesn't Vince McMahon help get ECW on TV nationwide? Sure, ECW is extremely violent and crude, but there are some great wrestlers there who deserve to be seen. I'm sure wrestling fans wouldn't mind seeing Sabu, Sandman, "Mr. Monday Night" Rob Van Dam, and Tommy Dreamer once a week. Maybe some parents wouldn't like the idea of their 11-year-olds looking at Francine or Beulah in skimpy outfits, but the WWF is just as provocative.

The bottom line is that the Monday night ratings war would be even greater if ECW was on the air.

JAIME LOPEZ
Moreno Valley, CA □

Masato Kakihara gets his kicks on Jun Akiyama. In an effort to please readers like John Clapp, who appreciates international competition, *PWI* now features monthly reports on both the Japanese and Mexican wrestling scenes.

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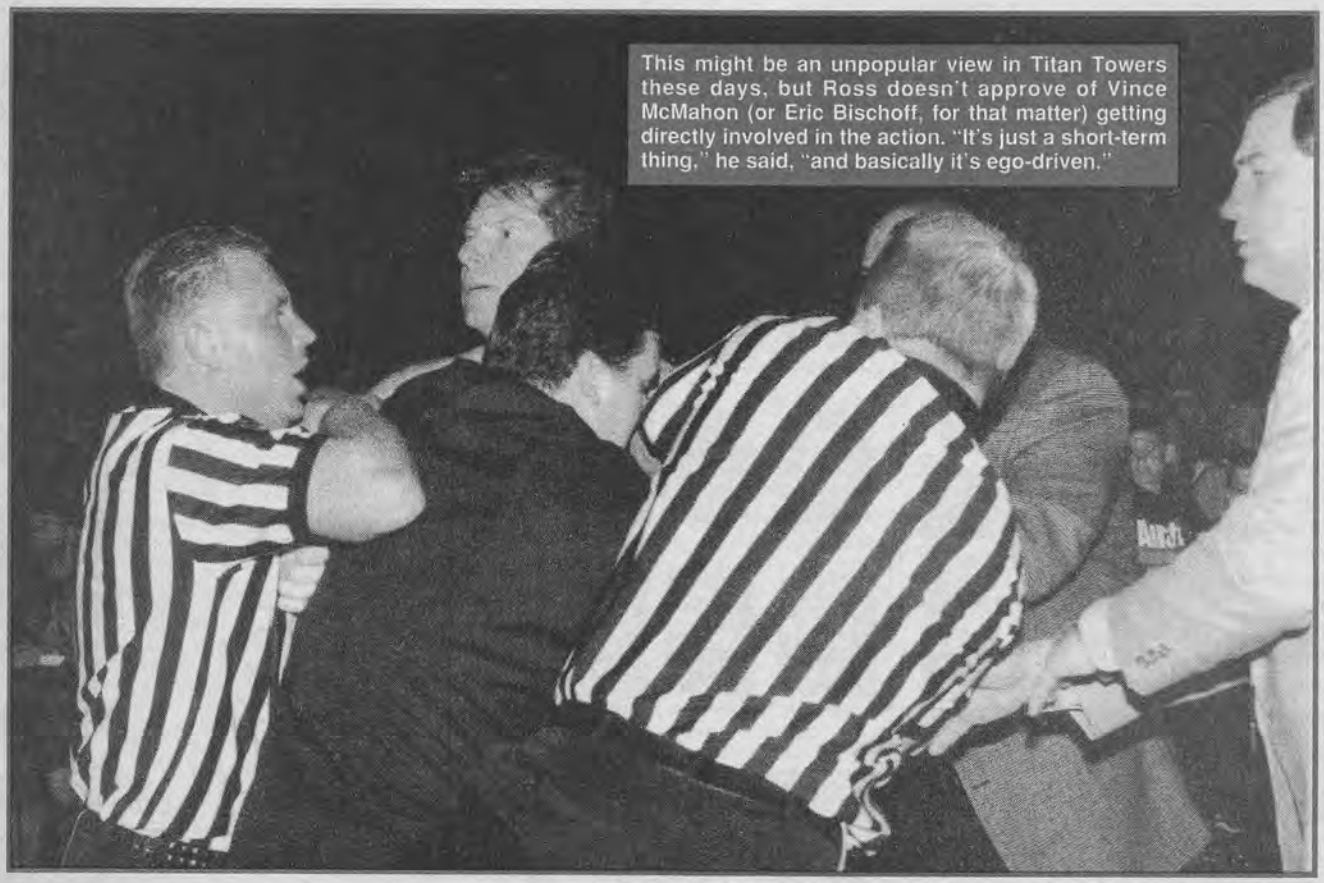
(Continued from page 25)



This might be an unpopular view in Titan Towers these days, but Ross doesn't approve of Vince McMahon (or Eric Bischoff, for that matter) getting directly involved in the action. "It's just a short-term thing," he said, "and basically it's ego-driven."

that door and accept that opportunity, great. If not, then we proceed as we are.

KREWDA: X-Pac recently came back to the WWF. Are there any other wrestlers out there, in WCW or any other place, that you see as being right for the WWF—anyone who you think could be a star if they came to the WWF?

ROSS: Well, contractually speaking, it wouldn't be fair for me to name names, and the reason for that is that it would put tremendous undue pressure on those individuals that I might name flippantly off the top of my head. Certainly, we are interested in guys that from bell to bell can demonstrate athletic ability and have competitive wrestling matches. We're also interested in youth. We think that our roster in the last year or so has gotten much younger. So any athlete that they have who could get it done, physically, bell to bell, and have youth going for them, certainly, again, if legal obstacles were eliminated, we'd be interested in.

KREWDA: In terms of the Monday night ratings war, what was once a one-sided battle has become quite a competition. Given the current climate of the business, how do you see this war playing out?

ROSS: Well, I think with Time Warner's resources, from a network perspective, with all the networks they own that allow them to promote their on-air products aggressively and frequently, because of all of Time Warner's money, basically, Ted Turner's money, it's always going to be competitive. But I think one of the reasons the tide is turning is the fact that the WWF has a younger talent base, we have a more athletic talent base, and our television storylines are much more clearly defined and are certainly not one- or two-dimensional. And I think we give the fans more reason to watch than the other group—and I'm not very unbiased—but that's my view.

KREWDA: Do you watch the other federations regularly?

ROSS: Yes, I watch WCW on tape. I try to watch ECW when the opportunity presents itself. I watch a lot of tapes of a lot of prospects, so I see a lot of other wrestling shows. And just for the competitive information, just to see what's happening, what's current in our business. I think we have some very interesting stories that people are tuning in to, and the stories are not—like I said—one- or two-dimensional. They're not just all about Hulk Hogan.

KREWDA: Give me a signature Jim Ross call behind the mike. Are

there any techniques or tricks that you've carried with you throughout your career?

ROSS: I try to change with the times and not get complacent. I think all the announcers, including me, we do too much digressing from the matches in the ring sometimes, because we have so much information that we need to disseminate. It's a pet peeve of mine to hear any of us continually hype our ratings. "Oh, we're number one, and this is number one." And I think the fans are really tired of it. They don't really care as long as they're being entertained. I think announcers are so busy trying to talk about either themselves or that they're number one, while these athletes in the ring are doing these breathtaking things and they're not even being responded to. But over the years, even though I try to change with the times, there are probably a few cliches that have probably been with me a real long time. Like when there's a real hard fight and the guys are just beating the heck out of each other, sometimes I'll call it a "slobberknocker," but that's an old football expression that Barry Switzer used back in the '70s, when Oklahoma was getting ready to play Nebraska one time. "It's going be a 'slobberknocker,'" and it sorta stuck with me. There's a lot of those little things, but I think basically, I've tried to evolve. I look at it this way: Every time I go out to do a match, I have to prove myself again. No matter what my perception to the audience may be, to the wrestlers may be, to the fans may be. Every time I go out to work, I have to prove myself again. And that's how I approach every show—that you're only as good as your last event you did.

KREWDA: On the subject of fan perception, you obviously play a major part in the inner workings of this promotion. Does it bother you that despite all the behind-the-scenes work, you are perceived by most fans a talking head?

ROSS: No, not really at all. My work in the office, my work dealing with agents and attorneys and wrestling talent is oftentimes certainly unglamorous. It certainly can be tedious and most of the time is very challenging. It can be frustrating. The opportunity to go out and announce wrestling matches and do play-by-play is still my passion, it's still what brought me to the dance, so I don't have a problem with that at all. I love my job, although oftentimes, portions of the negotiation aspect get a little bit tedious and a little bit boring, quite frankly, but you always get exhilarated when you work in front of a live crowd. The posters are oftentimes humorous—they motivate you. You look in their eyes and, man, they're here to have a great time. If you can't buy into that adrenaline and that enthusiasm, you really need to evaluate what you're doing for a living. So even though that other stuff, that VP stuff, may be taken for granted by the average fan, I think that's probably what they oughta do. And the only time I should probably get any feedback on that is if I stop doing a good job in attracting talent to come perform here.

KREWDA: Jim, you've already mentioned some of your pet peeves when it comes to calling play-by-play, but put on your VP hat for a moment. What trends in this sport would you like to see reversed or changed?

ROSS: Any sports fan that you would ask the question, "What's your pet peeve?" some of them would probably say free agency. Because what it does is break up teams, it breaks up a team's spirit, it ceases to allow long-term loyalty to one team, one community, one city, one franchise. I think that even though there are only two national companies in the States right now, it's still disheartening that some guys simply prostitute themselves for a paycheck. They've just factored the passion and the intangible out of what they do. And I think there's a pet peeve there. Another pet peeve is, whether it be Vince McMahon or Eric Bischoff, in my view, they should be seen less because of their responsibilities. I think that people in power sometimes get a little intoxicated by their power. The next thing you know, some people in power are putting their own picture in the centerfold of their own magazine. This is about the athletes, it's not about the administrators. It's not about who can commandeer a microphone, who can dictate mike time or TV time. The fans are here to see the athletes perform and compete and beat each other up. So I think that people in power sometimes get a little bit intoxicated by the power and do things that maybe 10 years or five years from now, they'll say, "Well, I probably should

THE MONDAY NIELSEN WAR

	Date	Rating	Households	Main Event
Raw	5/4	5.4	3.97 mil.	Foley-Funk
*Nitro	5/4	3.5	2.57 mil.	Luger-Nash
Raw	5/11	4.8	3.53 mil.	Austin/McMahon-Brown/Maivia
Nitro	5/11	4.3	3.15 mil.	Savage-Hogan
Raw	5/18	5.4	3.97 mil.	Outlaws-Maivia/Hart
*Nitro	5/18	2.5	1.83 mil.	Goldberg-Glacier
Raw	5/25	4.1	3.02 mil.	Austin-Undertaker
Nitro	5/25	4.2	3.08 mil.	Luger/Sting-Giant/Impostor

Cumulative (From 9/4/95): Nitro—3.43; Raw—2.79
*7 p.m. EDT starting time

have stayed in the background on that one and not gotten involved." Those two things are just personal pet peeves, they may make for interesting TV, but in the long haul, it's just a short-term thing, and basically it's ego-driven.

KREWDA: The WWF recently ran unopposed on a Tuesday night and did pretty well ratings-wise. Are there any plans to move *Raw* to Tuesday night now that USA Network is dropping *Tuesday Night Fights?*

ROSS: Yeah, we did real well on a Tuesday night. They know we've drawn ratings on Monday, we've drawn them on Saturday, we've drawn ratings on Tuesday—all at prime time. I think our audience, the WWF audience, and wrestling fans in general are very loyal. They'll tune in to the most obscure station as long as wrestling's on. They've done that over the years time and time again. I certainly think the fans would follow us to Tuesday. But as we speak, in this point in time, there is no discussion about us leaving Monday. We enjoy the competition on Monday. It's the home for Monday night. It's a big night for wrestling, obviously, in the States. So right now there's no plans for us leaving Monday. But if we do, we feel confident we can still deliver a strong audience, obviously unopposed on Tuesday, if that happened.

KREWDA: I'd like to play a little word association. I'll give you a name, and based on their relevance to the WWF, tell me what comes to mind.

ROSS: Okay, fine. Go ahead. Whoever.

KREWDA: Hulk Hogan.

ROSS: Hulk Hogan at one time was, without a doubt, the greatest box office attraction of all-time. Like any other great athlete, the older you get, the more of the luster you lose. And even though he's not very athletic anymore, he's still a vital part of our industry.

KREWDA: Steve Austin.

ROSS: He's certainly is, in the eyes of a lot of folks, the future of the WWF. It's amazing, the connection he has with the audience—the fans. Anywhere in the world, it doesn't matter if they speak English or they don't. "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin translates. He's an amazing individual. The only thing that would hurt Steve is if his individualistic and non-company attitude bites him in the rear someday. If that doesn't happen, he probably has the opportunity to go down as the greatest WWF champion that we've ever had.

KREWDA: Bret Hart.

ROSS: I think that Bret Hart, bell to bell, is one of the best technicians that I've ever seen. And Bret was a very vital part of the WWF for over a decade. It was unfortunate he had so many problems exiting the WWF. I wish that I, that we, were able to handle that differently. But I'm not going to say anything bad about Bret. I think he's a great athlete. I don't think that he'll ever be as big [in WCW] as he was here—and I don't know that that's going to be Bret's fault.

Ross on Steve Austin: "It's amazing, the connection he has with the audience—the fans ... The only thing that would hurt Steve is if his individualistic and non-company attitude bites him in the rear someday."

KREWDA: Eric Bischoff.

ROSS: When I worked for WCW, Eric reported to me as one of the announcers. Eric has lied on the Internet and to the media and anybody that will listen [by saying] that I was a vital part of the failures of WCW when I was working there. And I take great exception to that. He fails to mention that I never had his position at WCW. I never approved any budgets. I never hired any talent. I never fired any talent. So for him to try to position me to make himself look better, I think that was a cheap shot. And I think it was unwarranted. He thought my announcing was substandard. He thought that I was too regional—too Southern—that nobody would listen to me. And he reassigned me when he got the job. Of course, not face to face, but in writing, as he's done a lot of things. So I don't have a lot of respect for him on a personal level, on a business level, but I will give the devil his due: He has wisely spent Ted's money. And done a real good job of making investments from the stars that Vince McMahon created. Bischoff was wise enough, and was a good enough salesmen to his superiors, that he was able to get the budget to hire former WWF stars for a cornerstone for his own company. So I think from that respect, he's done a tremendous job. But as far as him trying to constantly, with his fragile ego, position me as the bad guy at WCW ... I worked there, never missed a day's work, took one vacation in five years, did everything they asked me to do, and was treated like a piece of dirt on the way out of there, with absolutely no respect whatsoever. I felt that was the wrong way to treat another human being.

KREWDA: Shawn Michaels.

ROSS: I think Shawn Michaels is probably the greatest in-ring performer that I've ever seen. I've seen Ric Flair in his heyday, when he was at the top of his game. And Shawn Michaels certainly compares, to me, as far as charisma, as far as work ethic, as far as in-ring ability, the sixth sense that you're either born with or not—he certainly reminds me of a Ric Flair, 15 or 20 years ago. At the top of his game. Great charisma. Great athlete. Nothing he can't do in the ring. The only thing that will ever curtail Shawn Michaels is his own body. He's put his body on the line for 12, 13, 14 years. His style takes its toll on you. He's not a 300-pound guy whose body absorbs shock easier than a 220-pound guy. The only thing that will ever let Shawn Michaels down is Mother Nature. But, bottom line: I don't think I've ever seen anybody that could outperform Shawn Michaels in the ring.

KREWDA: What's the official word on how long Shawn will be out?

ROSS: Again, it goes back to what I said about Mother Nature. Based on when the two herniated disks heal, based on how Shawn's arthritic knee responds to rehab and things, Shawn will be back and probably better than ever. I expect Shawn Michaels to be back here again sometime in 1998, better than he's ever been, because he'll be healthier than he's been allowed to be in the last four or five years.

KREWDA: Mike Tyson.

ROSS: You know, I found Mike Tyson to be totally unlike my perception of Mike before meeting him. You know, I obviously read the papers. I'm a big boxing fan. I've followed his career, as storied and as checkered as some of his life has been. But I found him to be very honorable. I found him to be very cooperative. The one thing he and I had in common—and here's a Caucasian Oklahoman and a black man from Brooklyn—the bond was that he is a tremendous student of the game of wrestling and had been legitimately a lifelong fan. He can recite, chapter and verse, things he saw on TV as a youngster. So I found him to be a guy who didn't want to disappoint the fans. He wanted to entertain. He wanted to

(Continued on page 56)

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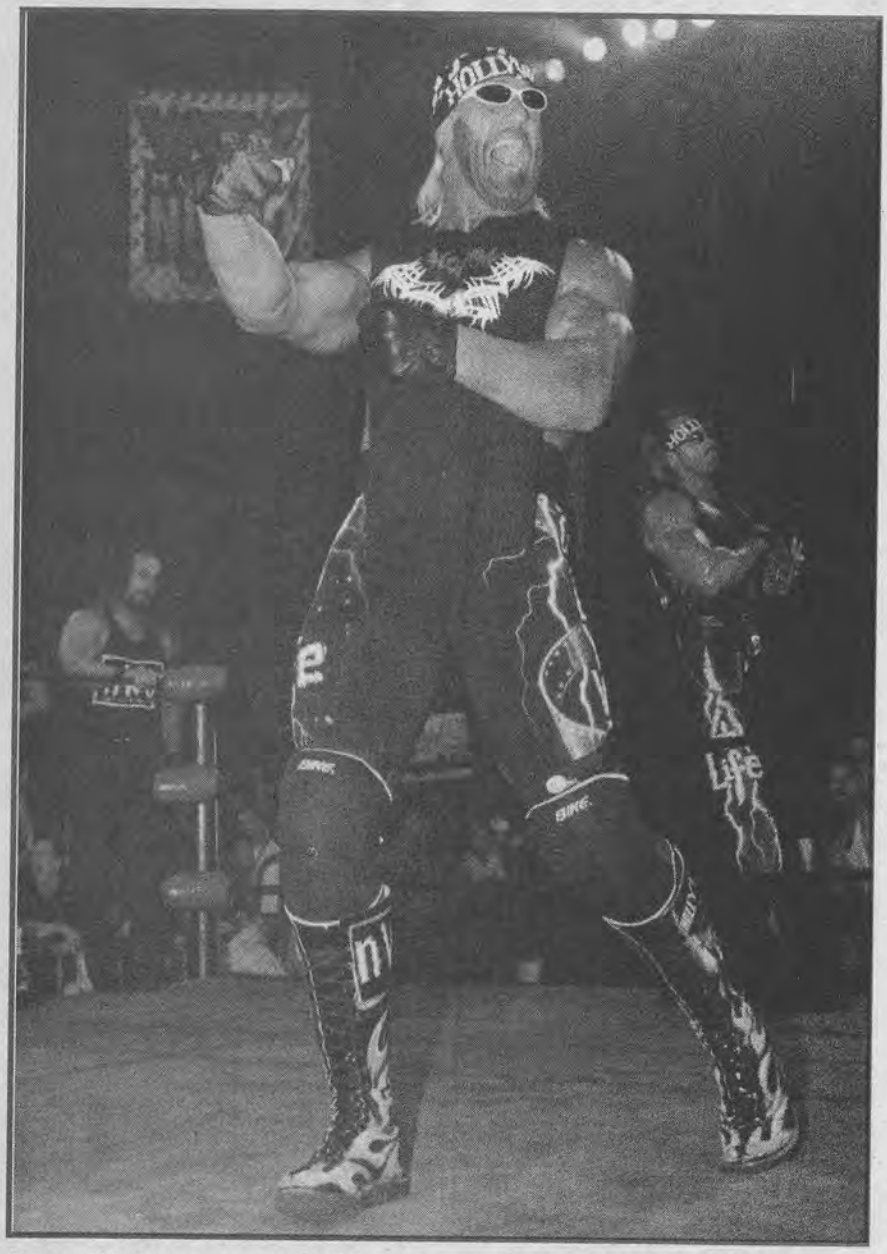

Ross on Hollywood Hogan: "Hulk Hogan at one time was, without a doubt, the greatest box office attraction of all-time ... Even though he's not very athletic anymore, he's still a vital part of our industry."

excite. He had a love for it, and I'll be very surprised if we don't do something else with Mike Tyson somewhere down the line.

KREWDA: I know it's difficult to prognosticate, especially in this business, but where do you see Jim Ross and the WWF five or 10 years from now?

ROSS: I think you're going see the youth movement in the WWF continuing in five years. I think our talent relations efforts in recruiting and signing quality young prospects will continue. You'll probably see many of these guys that are here today, that are getting a little bit older, have to make a decision: Do you want to join the senior's tour over in WCW, or do you want to stay here and attempt to keep up with these young guys? I think in five years, you're going continue to see—hopefully you'll see—probably more athletes that have incomparable ability ... But it's hard to say where we're going be in five years because we're going to change with society. We're going to change with viewing habits. We're going to change with other prime time TV programs. So it's hard to predict where we'll be. We're going be on the cutting edge of the equation. We're going to be more proactive than reactive, as we are trying to be now.

KREWDA: What do you make of the claim that DeGeneration X is a ripoff of the NWO?

ROSS: Oh, no. If you go back and look at it chronologically, how The Kliq was here, there's certainly an argument to be made that The Kliq was the forerunner to the NWO ... [Scott Hall and Kevin Nash] built their relationship here in The Kliq. They were the founding fathers, they meaning Hall and Nash. Then they added Sean Waltman, who was a member of The Kliq here. There's certainly an argument to be made that The Kliq was the genesis, or the original idea ... The success of the NWO certainly didn't slow down our thought process that we put together an entity ... This isn't something that nobody had never done. Of course, if you ask Bischoff, I'm sure he'll take credit for that, and if that's the way he truly feels, we thank him for the idea.

KREWDA: Who are the brightest prospects right now? Who are the diamonds in the rough?

ROSS: We have several guys in our camp that certainly have the opportunity to be good. Val Venis is one of our training camp products—I think he's going have a great future in the WWF. Another

young man by the name of Adam Copeland (The Edge), he's from Toronto, has a wealth of ability. He's a 6'3", 240-pound younger version of Shawn Michaels—as far as where Shawn was at that stage of the game. Being hungry, having that natural gift for timing, having that talent, I think he has a great chance to really be a player here. And we signed three youngsters from California about a month or two ago who we think have great potential. And, again, we're always looking. We have an active recruiting program with amateur wrestling through Danny Hodge, who's probably one of the greatest amateur wrestlers in the country ever. Gerald Brisco, who's on our staff, was a great amateur at Oklahoma State. So our scouts, whether it be in amateur wrestling, our contacts in the NFL, and our contacts with wrestling schools, we hope to continue to cultivate that and bring in new faces. Keep the thing fresh, keep the thing exciting.

KREWDA: How does the WWF intend to use the NWA?

ROSS: One of the things the NWA

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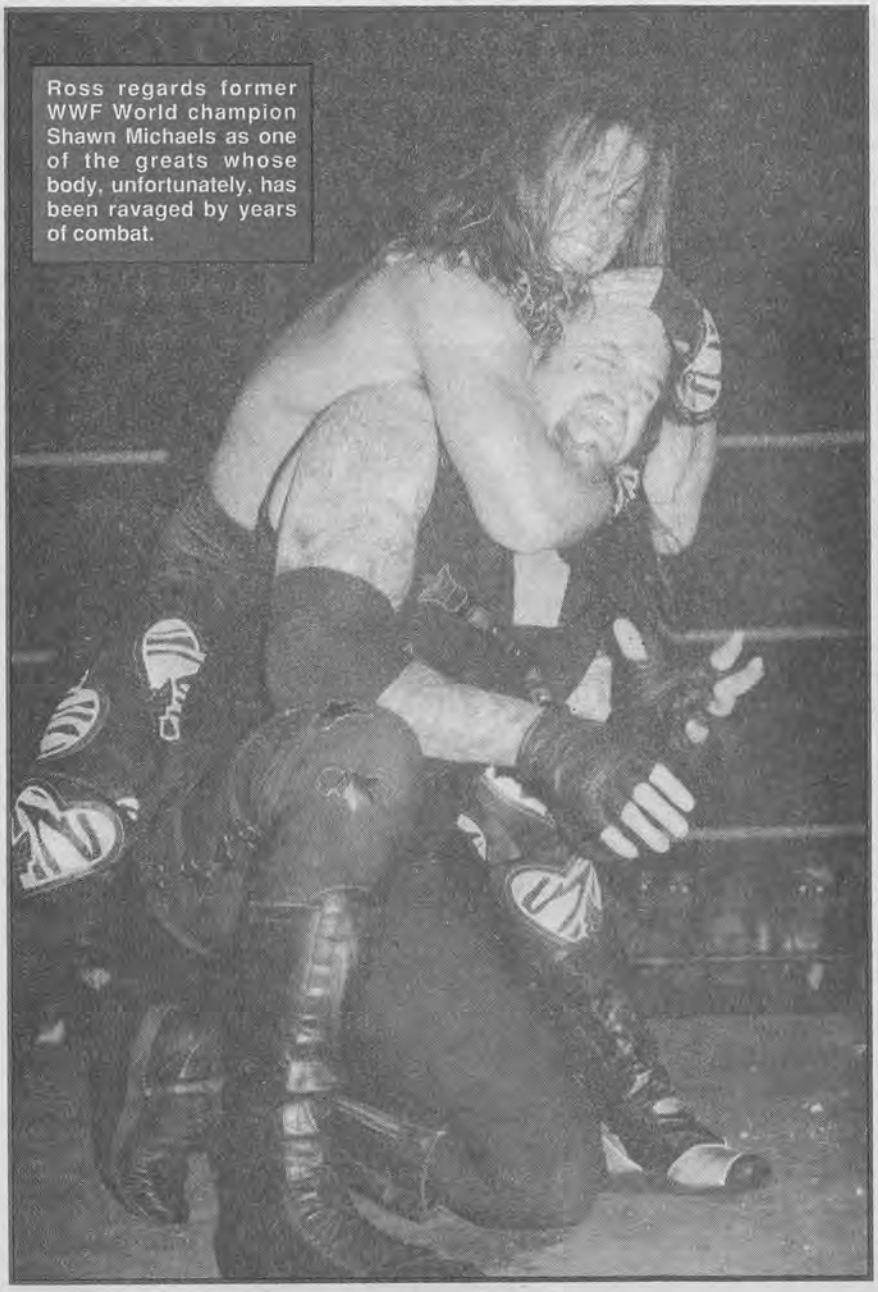

Ross regards former WWF World champion Shawn Michaels as one of the greats whose body, unfortunately, has been ravaged by years of combat.

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does ... is further illustrate the heritage and the history of our business—and I think that's good. I've always been one for ... you know, I get a kick out of WCW talking about their roots go back to 1905 and the NWA, which is absolutely ludicrous. And it's offensive and insulting to students of the game. It's absolutely wrong. Jim Cornette, a few months ago, had a very interesting article in one of our publications about the history of the NWA. Now I don't agree with Cornette on his philosophy on a lot of things—he's a very talented guy, no doubt about that—but he was right on the money about the history of the NWA and how WCW is trying to latch on to the NWA coattails with their heritage. And, again, if you're a true student of the game and know the story, maybe if you pick up that article from Cornette and read that article, you'll see it's a sham. So the NWA, if nothing else, allowed us to explain what it was and what it meant to the fabric of our business as this business has evolved.

KREWDA: As an evaluator of talent, Jim, what type of wrestler catches your eye? Do you favor an aerialist to a mat technician, for example?

ROSS: I've always gravitated to the more athletic wrestlers. It's always fun to see a great showman, but when you can combine athleticism and showmanship, you really get the whole package in that situation. When I was a kid, Danny Hodge was a great illustration of a very humble athlete. Danny wasn't blessed with huge charisma from a Ric Flair perspective, but he was probably one of the greatest in-ring technicians I have ever seen. Jack Brisco was one of the greatest I have ever seen. Jack had great charisma, but Jack was a natural in this business. But he never lost his roots. Whenever he got into a jam in the ring, he always went back to amateur wrestling. That's what brought him to the dance. Those kind of guys, and the guys like Steve Austin. Steve Austin is a throwback to the hard-nosed, ask-no-quarter, give-no-quarter, beat-my-ass-if-you-can, all-business, no-nonsense athlete. But Steve Austin also has a gift. He has the "it" factor. He has charisma. And Steve Austin probably connects to his audience in 1998 better than anybody I've ever seen. He knows what they're thinking, almost before they think it. He's really in tune. So that's a testament to him, to not allow himself to become such a big star. No wrestler is bigger than the business. This business has endured. Everybody said what happened in Montreal in November, at Survivor Series, changed the business. Well, I think that was a little bit overreacting, I don't know how much it changed the business. I know it may have caused an interesting controversy for a week or so. For those that want to bring it up, and still do from time to time, nobody's bigger than the business. Vince McMahon's not bigger than the business. Bret Hart's not bigger than the business. Steve Austin's not bigger than the business. Neither is Hulk Hogan or Eric Bischoff. The business is comprised of the loyal people who watch it every week on TV and buy the tickets to come see these guys live. Those are the people that have the biggest influence on what we do and how well we do it. It's not me, it's not any individual—it's the people. And as long as all the decision-makers in our

Eric Bischoff has pointed fingers at Ross as part of the reason for WCW's earlier lack of success. This deeply angers Ross, who served under Watts at the time and was not the ultimate decision-maker.

industry can remember, are you making your audience happy? Are you providing the product they want to see? Are you listening to them? Are you reading the Internet posts? Are you reading the fan mail? Are you doing the necessary market research? Market research is done every single night. So as long as we don't quit listening, as long as we keep observing and paying attention and respecting the fans' view, then this business will continue to go on, as it has, through hell and high water. And there's not any one individual or change of the guard that's going to affect it. As long as we continue to give the people what they want to see. And we continue to produce new stars ... and continue to be on the edge—don't step over the line, don't become crass, don't become low brow, don't become low road. Have a little wink in your eye and walk that fine line, walk on the edge, but don't go over the edge.

KREWDA: Who determines the edge? The USA Network? The fans? After all, they pay your grocery bill.

ROSS: They pay your grocery bill, they buy magazines. The advertisers buy advertising. So it's more of an accumulative effect, and there is not one entity that dictates the direction. Vince has a great feel for what he believes the fans want. We have intelligent people doing research. We get feedback from our sponsors. We get feedback from our TV affiliates. We do a lot of listening, and I think that's what you got to do to be able to provide the product that the consumer wants. And they're going tell you, more often than not. Sometimes they tell you by not being in the seats. Sometimes they tell by the ratings not being very good. Sometimes they tell you by how many people buy the pay-per-view. They'll tell you, "I didn't like the buildup. I didn't like the scenarios. I wasn't intrigued. It wasn't provocative to me, it wasn't compelling." We listen to a lot of different people that have a vested interest in our product, whether it be a building manager, a station manager, it could be Barry Diller. We're going listen to all our associates, because they have a vested interest in our success. Then we take that information, then we make the decisions as to what steps to take next.

KREWDA: Do the numbers support Titan's decision to pursue more adult-oriented programming, even though the WWF stood to lose a segment of the audience?

ROSS: Yes. Without a doubt. The statistical data that we are able to obtain, whether it be television ratings, box office receipts for live events, television buy rates for pay-per-views, all those have indicated to us at this juncture that we are traveling the right road. We are certainly breaking molds, and we are taking different paths, but we are still trying to get to the same destination. The destination is always the same: Give your best effort. Entertain the people as best you can, and hopefully give them a reason to tune into your next broadcast or to attend your next live event. That will never cease being our goal. Make the audience happy. As long as we have that philosophy, whether it's us with our "edge" or whether we go back to being kinder and more gentle. Again, society is going to dictate those changes. We never prepared to lose anybody. We only prepared to become more attractive to a male, 18-to-49-year-old demographic. That is not to say we don't want females or males older than 49 watching our product. Or that we want off turn off kids. We don't want to turn off anybody. During this process of change in philosophy, we shocked some people, and we've startled some people to the point where they weren't sure what they were seeing. But apparently, from the ratings and all of our other statistical data and indicators, we made the right decision. And those same indicators will tell us when we need to make another tweak. And again, we'll keep listening. □

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Austin disposed of cagey veteran Terry Funk, hard-working "Diamond" Dallas Page, and the behemoth Giant before running into technical wizard Malenko. "The Man Of 1,000 Holds" beat Owen Hart, New Japan superstar Shinya Hashimoto, and the very powerful Lex Luger before meeting Austin in the tourney showdown.

Austin vs. Malenko proved to be a compelling matchup in many ways. Although their wrestling styles differ drastically—Austin prefers brawling tactics, while Malenko's takes a more scientific approach—the two men have a similar no-nonsense demeanor once the bell rings.

Arthur Buck, of Cleveland, Ohio, gave us one of the more interesting and detailed indications of how this thrilling final bout might have played out:

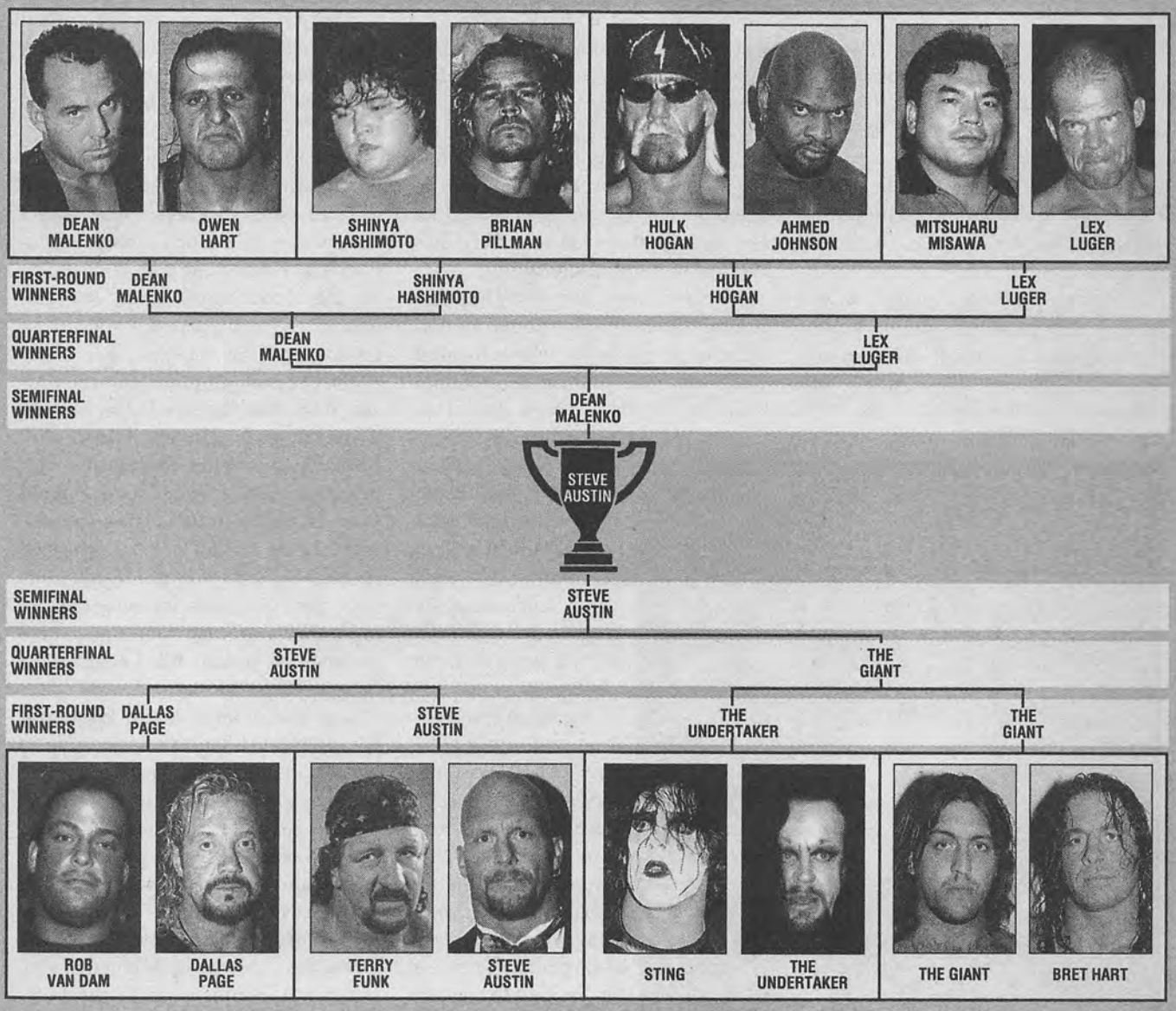
"Austin would definitely try to rattle Malenko with his gangbusters ring entrance, but since Dean is a real pro, the look on his face would never change. He'd maintain his composure and approach Austin as if he were just any other opponent. But 'Stone-Cold' isn't just any other opponent, and after a few minutes of tentative circling, Austin would plant a boot in Malenko's gut. After delivering several punches to Malenko, Austin would try to scoop him up for a bodyslam, but Dean would find a way to block it and roll Austin into a small package for a two-count.

"Startled, Austin would kick out and try to rethink his strategy. Both wrestlers would then trade takedown maneuvers until Vince McMahon suddenly appeared at ringside. Distracted by McMahon's presence, Austin would turn to yell at his boss. That's when you'd see Malenko kick Austin's legs out from under him and roll him over into the 'Texas Cloverleaf.' Somehow, maybe inspired by the smug look on McMahon's face, Austin would power out and send Malenko face-first into the ropes. Austin would then spin a disoriented Malenko around and hit him with a 'Stone-Cold stunner' and that would be it."

Amber Quinn from Mobile, Alabama, contributed a different scenario. "I'm sure Malenko would answer every Austin charge with an armdrag takedown or a legsweep. He could make the WWF champ look like a fool. Exhausted and frustrated, Austin would sag while Malenko confused him with his scientific mastery. Eventually, a beaten Austin would fall pray to the 'Texas Cloverleaf,' and that hard-edged 'Stone-Cold' mystique would finally be shattered by a *real* ring technician, Dean Malenko."

TOURNAMENT

FAN BALLOT



Lou Padulla, a self-proclaimed "diehard Austin fan," checked in with this ending: "Malenko would be game, but he'd be no match for Austin's two-fisted attack. I see 'Stone-Cold' kicking and punching Malenko around the ring and showing him some of that WWF attitude. It'd be just a matter of minutes before Austin gave Malenko the 'Stone-Cold stunner' and got the win."

Although the competition was meant to get harder as each wrestler advanced to the next round, the outcome of the Austin-Malenko matchup was fairly clear-cut in the eyes of our readers, with the "Texas Rattlesnake" capturing a whopping 79 percent of the votes.

Thanks to everyone who voted, and don't forget: We'll print the final results of the *PWI* Dream Tag Team Tournament in our December 1998 issue!

the JAPAN REPORT

By Mike Spillane

WRESTLING WITH A shattered kneecap, a broken finger, and a strained back, **Mitsuharu Misawa** battled valiantly in defense of his All-Japan Pro Wrestling Triple Crown against his nemesis, **Toshiaki Kawada**, but after nearly a half-hour of back-and-forth action, Kawada executed a power bomb and took the victory.

Misawa's title loss brought an end to one of his longest winning streaks ever. He had just come off a victory over occasional tag team partner **Jun Akiyama** in the finals of the 1998 Champion Carnival, where he also wrestled against doctors' orders. He will likely take two to three months off to recuperate from his injuries before returning to active competition. For Kawada, this was undoubtedly the biggest win of his career. The challengers to his Triple Crown are already lining up; the first to get a shot at the new champ will be Akiyama. Next after him will be **Kenta Kobashi**.

Toshiaki Kawada gets set to power bomb Mitsuharu Misawa and beat him for the All-Japan Triple Crown. Kawada's triumph ended a long winning streak for Misawa.

In New Japan Pro Wrestling, the annual "Best Of The Super Junior" tournament lineup has been expanded. This round-robin tournament is currently set to include a who's who of the NJPW junior heavyweights, including **Shinjiro Otani**, **Koji Kanemoto**, **Tatsuhito Takaiwa**, **Kendo Ka Shin**, **El Samurai**, and **Jushin Liger**. Luchadore **Dr. Wagner Jr.** is also slated to compete in the tournament.

Big Japan Pro Wrestling prodigy **Yoshihiro Tajiri** was set to appear in the "Best Of The Super Junior" tournament, but he has since left Japan for Mexico. Tajiri turned away offers from several large companies in the Far East to compete for EMLL, where he sometimes appears as **Aquarius**.

If you ever wondered just how different the perception of professional wrestlers in Japan is from the public perception of their counterparts in America, look no further than the Japanese Diet. The Diet is the Japanese equivalent of the American Congress, and wrestlers from **Hiroshi Hase** to **Antonio Inoki** have served in it. Now All-Japan Women star **Yumiko Hotta** is running for a seat. Hotta is not just a wrestler and a politician; she's also a professional kickboxer in the Land of the Rising Sun. (Could you see **Hollywood Hogan** as a U.S. senator?)

The pay-per-view market abroad isn't at all like it is here in the States. While these type of wrestling programs take place on roughly a biweekly basis domestically, they are rare overseas. FMW held its first pay-per-view in more than six months this spring, and it featured a Brass Knuckles Independent heavyweight title match between champion **Mr. Gannosuke** and the high-flying **Hayabusa**. Hayabusa use his "galcon arrow" and "phoenix splash" en route to capturing the title.

Other results from the pay-per-view saw **Bam Bam Bigelow** defeat **Masato Tanaka** and **Jinsei "Hakushi" Shinzaki** pin **Wing Kanemura** with his praying power bomb. Also, **Fuyuki** pinned **Atsushi Onita** in what was considered a big upset. Onita has competed in countless bloody death matches throughout his career, including exploding barbed-wire cage bouts and matches contested in rings filled with broken glass and thumbtacks.

Ageless veteran **Gran Hamada**, who celebrated his 25th anniversary in wrestling last year, has yet another light heavyweight title to add to his already-sizable collection of championships. Hamada defeated **Super Boy** in a little more than 10 minutes to take his WWA light heavyweight title.

The Masked Tiger and **Sasuke the Great** have arrived in Michinoku Pro, much to the confusion of the fans. **Takeshi Ono** and **Masao Orihara** have assumed these respective identities in order to mock fan favorites **Tiger Mask IV** and **The Great Sasuke**. While Sasuke prepares for his return from knee surgery, **Masato Yakushiji** and **Naohiro Hoshikawa** are lobbying to get the first crack at the impostors and defend the honor of their comrades.

Soo da, sayonara! □

the MEXICO REPORT

By John Molinaro

THE BIG NEWS in Promo Azteca this month is bad news. The Azteca Television Network has decided to stop airing Promo Azteca's weekly TV program for at least a few months.

Promo Azteca's contract with Azteca TV recently expired, and the network doesn't want to start airing the show again until the end of the summer because of its commitments to carry the 1998 World Cup of Soccer. Promo Azteca owner **Jorge Rojas** has also been diligently trying to negotiate a deal with WCW to help syndicate his show in the U.S. WCW has reportedly expressed interest, but it is unable to commit to the project at this time.

La Parka goes high into the air to bring down Pierroth Jr., his arch-rival in Promo Azteca. One of these men will lose his mask in Mexico this summer.

If the two organizations can work out a deal, American fans unfamiliar with Promo Azteca might finally get a chance to view the product on a regular basis.

In other Promo Azteca news: One of the biggest matches of the year has been signed, as the popular **La Parka** will take on **Pierroth Jr.**, the undisputed top *rudo* in Promo Azteca, in a mask vs. mask match this summer in Nuevo Laredo. Back in 1996, Nuevo Laredo, located on the Mexico-Texas border, was one of the true hotbeds of wrestling, drawing crowds of 14,000 on a weekly basis.

IWC champion **Pirata Morgan** is being challenged by **Vampiro Canadiense**. Vampiro has come very close to lifting the strap from Morgan on more than one occasion. WCW newcomer **Kaz Hayashi** most recently competed in Promo Azteca as **Shiryu** before leaving the promotion. He had come to Mexico late last year after competing in Michinoku Pro in Japan.

In AAA news, the promotion was gearing up for TripleMania VI at press time. The annual spectacular consists of a series of three big shows in three different cities, with the final show being the culmination of several high-profile feuds.

Officials hadn't released the dates or locations for this year's event as of press time, but speculation was that AAA was trying to sign a match between **The Brennan Twins** (the young hosts of a popular TV program in Mexico) and the team of **Abismo Negro** and **Fuerza Guerrera**. Earlier in the year, Abismo Negro piledrived **Jorge Brennan** on a chair during a steel cage match, which resulted in Jorge leaving ringside on a stretcher.

Hot feuds in AAA right now include Mexican National tag team champs Fuerza Guerrera and **Mosco de la Merced II** vs. **Octagon** and **Pentagon**, **Los Payasos** (the clowns) vs. **Los Vipers**, and Abismo Negro vs. Pentagon.

In EMLL, **Brazo de Oro** was the latest to fall victim to a common prematch stipulation. He squared off against rival **Gran Markus** in a hair vs. hair match in Mexico City and lost when Markus rolled him up for the pin after fouling him with a blow to the groin behind the referee's back (such an act is cause for an immediate disqualification in Lucha Libre).

El Felino was reinstated as WWA welterweight champion after being stripped of the title earlier. He defeated CMLL welterweight champion **Karloff Lagarde Jr.** in Mexico City in one of his first title defenses. Lagarde's welterweight title was not on the line, but there has been talk of signing a unification match in the near future.

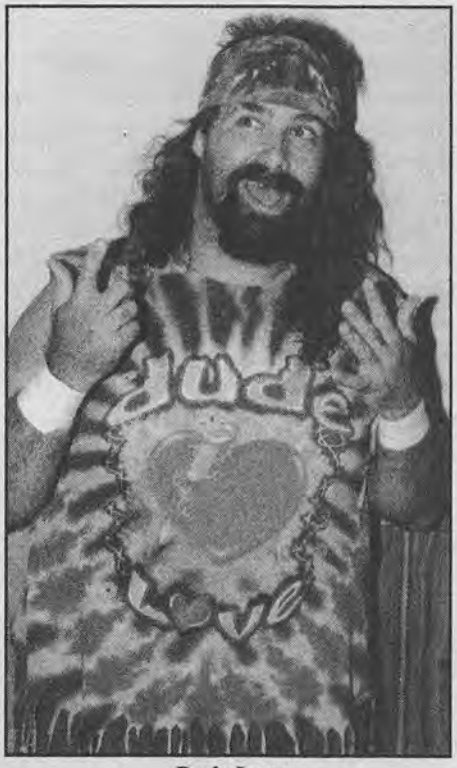
The feud between former CMLL tag team champions **Emilio Charles Jr.** and **Dr. Wagner Jr.** rages on. They recently squared off in a series of six-man tag matches, as Charles has enlisted the help of **The Headhunters**, while Wagner has chosen **Apolo Dantes** and **Satanico** as his partners. □

Vampiro Canadiense has no belt around his waist here, but that will change if he is able to defeat Pirata Morgan.

PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED

TOP 10

1. **STEVE AUSTIN**
   252, Victoria, TX
   (1) WWF World champion
2. **BILL GOLDBERG**
   270, Tulsa, OK
   (6) U.S. heavyweight champion
3. **ROCKY MAIVIA**
   272, Pearl City, HI
   (8) WWF Intercontinental champion
4. **LEX LUGER**
   265, Chicago, IL
   (7) No. 3 contender: WCW World title
5. **HUNTER HEARST HELMSLEY**
   279, Greenwich, CT
   (10) WWF European champion
6. **STING**
   260, Venice Beach, CA
   (2) No. 2 contender: WCW World title
7. **TOSHIAKI KAWADA**
   245, Ashikaga, Japan
   (-) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
8. **DUDE LOVE**
   277, Truth or Consequences, NM
   (-) No. 4 contender: WWF World title
9. **ROB VAN DAM**
   237, Battle Creek, MI
   (-) ECW TV champion
10. **OWEN HART**
    227, Calgary, Alberta
    (9) No. 7 contender: WWF World title



Dude Love

TAG TEAMS

1. **BILLY GUNN & JESSE JAMES**
   Combined weight: 496 pounds
   (1) WWF World tag team champions
2. **LOD 2000**
   Combined weight: 560 pounds
   (2) No. 1 contenders: WWF World tag title
3. **CHRIS CANDIDO & LANCE STORM**
   Combined weight: 457 pounds
   (8) ECW tag team champions
4. **EIGHT-BALL & SKULL**
   Combined weight: 517 pounds
   (-) No. 2 contenders: WWF World tag title
5. **BUH BUH RAY & D-VON DUDLEY**
   Combined weight: 585 pounds
   (5) No. 1 contenders: ECW tag title
6. **THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS**
   Combined weight: 487 pounds
   (7) NWA tag team champions
7. **THE HEADBANGERS**
   Combined weight: 488 pounds
   (6) No. 3 contenders: WWF World tag title
8. **JIM NEIDHART & DAVEY BOY SMITH**
   Combined weight: 520 pounds
   (-) No. 1 contenders: WCW World tag title
9. **BRADSHAW & TAKA MICHINOKU**
   Combined weight: 478 pounds
   (-) No. 4 contenders: WWF World tag title
10. **RENO RIGGINS & STEVEN DUNN**
    Combined weight: 471 pounds
    (-) MCW tag team champions

WCW

World Champion:
HOLLYWOOD HOGAN
(C) 275, Venice Beach, CA

1—BILL GOLDBERG
(1) 270, Tulsa, OK
2—STING
(2) 260, Venice Beach, CA
3—LEX LUGER
(3) 265, Chicago, IL
4—BRET HART
(10) 235, Calgary, Alberta
5—CHRIS BENOIT
(-) 218, Edmonton, Alberta
6—BOOKER T
(4) 250, Harlem, NY
7—THE GIANT
(9) 430, parts unknown
8—DIAMOND DALLAS PAGE
(6) 260, Tampa, FL
9—DAVE FINLAY
(-) 243, Belfast, Ireland
10—CHRIS JERICHO
(5) 225, Vancouver, British Columbia

WWF

World Champion:
STEVE AUSTIN
(C) 252, Victoria, TX

1—ROCKY MAIVIA
(1) 272, Pearl City, HI
2—HUNTER HEARST HELMSLEY
(4) 279, Greenwich, CT
3—THE UNDERTAKER
(2) 328, parts unknown
4—DUDE LOVE
(5) 277, Truth or Consequences, NM
5—KANE
(7) 345, parts unknown
6—JEFF JARRETT
(6) 230, Nashville, TN
7—OWEN HART
(3) 227, Calgary, Alberta
8—FAAROOQ
(8) 291, Perry, GA
9—STEVE BLACKMAN
(-) 245, Annville, PA
10—BRADSHAW
(-) 309, Roscoe, TX

NWA

NWA Champion:
DAN SEVERN
(C) 265, Detroit, MI

1—COLORADO KID
(2) 231, Denver, CO
2—ROD PRICE
(-) 265, Los Angeles, CA
3—DOUG GILBERT
(1) 241, Lexington, TN
4—DORY FUNK JR.
(-) 250, Amarillo, TX
5—KING KONG BUNDY
(9) 446, Atlantic City, NJ
6—ERICH SBRACCIA
(5) 242, Boston, MA
7—SID VICIOUS
(-) 318, West Memphis, AR
8—RIP ROGERS
(6) 239, Cleveland, OH
9—LANCE DIAMOND
(10) 230, Richmond, VA
10—BARRY WINDHAM
(3) 273, Sweetwater, TX

ECW

ECW Champion:
SHANE DOUGLAS
(C) 240, Pittsburgh, PA

1—ROB VAN DAM
(1) 237, Battle Creek, MI
2—SABU
(4) 225, Bombay
3—TAZ
(-) 248, Red Hook, NY
4—BAM BAM BIGELOW
(2) 368, Mt. Laurel, NJ
5—AL SNOW
(3) 232, Lima, OH
6—TOMMY DREAMER
(6) 245, Yonkers, NY
7—THE SANDMAN
(10) 244, Philadelphia, PA
8—CHRIS CANDIDO
(9) 226, Carteret, NJ
9—JUSTIN CREDIBLE
(5) 225, Waterbury, CT
10—LANCE STORM
(8) 234, Calgary, Alberta

OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue. while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

For period ended June 1, 1998

AAA: Champion—Perro Aguayo; 1—Abismo Negro; 2—Pentagon; 3—Octagon; 4—Heavy Metal; 5—Fuerza Guerrera; 6—Cibernetico; 7—Sangre Chicana; 8—Perro Aguayo Jr.; 9—El Corbade Jr.; 10—Latin Lover.

ALL-PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Maxx Justice; 1—Michael Modest; 2—Erin O' Grady; 3—Vic Grimes; 4—Tony Jones; 5—Donovan Morgan; 6—Robert Thompson; 7—Frank Murdoch; 8—Jay Smooth; 9—Chris Cole; 10—Rick Turner.

ALTERNATIVE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Rick Morton; 1—Manny Fernandez; 2—Bobby Fulton; 3—Robbie Auman; 4—Jimmy Valiant; 5—Tim Blaze; 6—Pat Friday; 7—L.A. Wild One; 8—David Isley; 9—Jeff Knotts; 10—David Jericho.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Glen Osbourne; 1—Reckless Youth; 2—Lance Diamond; 3—Inferno Kid; 4—Devon Storm; 5—Ace Darling; 6—Mike Quackenbush; 7—Boogie Woogie Brown; 8—Mr. Ooh La La; 9—Mark Shrader; 10—Blue Thunder.

GRANDE WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—George Steele; 1—Flexx Wheeler; 2—Bob Steele; 3—Mandingo Warrior; 4—Alexi Taktarov; 5—Jake Lawless; 6—Rolling Thunder; 7—Ron Starr; 8—Middknight; 9—Danny Rhodes; 10—George Love.

MID-EASTERN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—John Rambo; 1—Mad Russian; 2—King Kong Bundy; 3—Slicky Boy; 4—Morgus the Maniac; 5—Julio Sanchez; 6—Jack Hammer; 7—Perfect Creation; 8—Biggs; 9—Texas Outlaw; 10—Todd Justice.

NEW DIMENSION WRESTLING: Champion—Madd Maxx; 1—Rick Morton; 2—Bobby Fulton; 3—Jackie Fulton; 4—Rick Link; 5—Pez Whatley; 6—Rikki Nelson; 7—Surge; 8—Dale Porter; 9—Venom; 10—Willow The Wisp.

NWA NEW ENGLAND: Champion—Erich Sbraccia; 1—Vic Steamboat; 2—Knuckles Nelson; 3—Tony Rumble; 4—Ace Darling; 5—Abdullah The Butcher; 6—Tony Atlas; 7—El Mascarado; 8—Joel Davis; 9—Devon Storm; 10—Pink Assassin.

PENNSYLVANIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Tiger Khan; 1—Mr. Ooh La La; 2—Julio Sanchez; 3—Reckless Youth; 4—Lance Diamond; 5—Mike Quackenbush; 6—Sexton Hardcastle; 7—Boogie Woogie Brown; 8—Christian Cage; 9—Dave Patera; 10—Glen Osbourne.

POWER PRO WRESTING: Champion—Title Vacant; 1—Jerry Lawler; 2—Buddy Landell; 3—Austin Idol; 4—Bill Dundee; 5—Brian Christopher; 6—Spellbinder; 7—Bobby Bronze; 8—Lance Jade; 9—Tracey Smothers; 10—Kid Wicked.

PRO WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—George South; 1—Italian Stallion; 2—Ripper; 3—Black Angel; 4—The Breeze; 5—The Bodyguard; 6—Scotty Hotbody; 7—Scott Powers; 8—Super Ninja; 9—American G.I.; 10—Flaming Youth.

SOUTHERN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Jimmy Cicero; 1—Chris Stephenson; 2—Boris Dragoff; 3—Otto Schwanz; 4—Cueball Carmicheal; 5—Venom; 6—Big Slam; 7—Major DeBeers; 8—K.C. Thunder; 9—Eddie Brown; 10—David Blanchard.

NEW JAPAN

IWGP Champion:
TATSUMI FUJINAMI
(C) 234, Oita, Japan

1—KENSUKE SASAKI
(1) 233, Tokyo, Japan
2—SHINYA HASHIMOTO
(2) 287, Gifu, Japan
3—MASA CHONO
(3) 235, Tokyo, Japan
4—JUSHIN LIGER
(5) 206, Hiroshima, Japan
5—HIROYOSHI TENZAN
(6) 270, Tokyo, Japan
6—NAOYA OGAWA
(7) 286, Tokyo, Japan
7—GENICHIRO TENRYU
(–) 235, Fukui, Japan
8—SHIRO KOSHINAKA
(–) 225, Tokyo, Japan
9—SHINJIRO OTANI
(–) 215, Yokohama, Japan
10—BIG TITAN
(–) 352, Calgary, Alberta

ALL-JAPAN

Triple Crown Champion:
TOSHIAKI KAWADA
(C) 245, Ashikaga, Japan

1—JUN AKIYAMA
(2) 230, Hiroshima, Japan
2—AKIRA TAUE
(4) 265, Chichibu, Japan
3—KENTA KOBASHI
(3) 261, Fukuchiyama, Japan
4—JOHNNY ACE
(7) 250, San Bernardino, CA
5—STAN HANSEN
(5) 322, Borger, TX
6—MAUNUKEA MOSSMAN
(10) 245, Honolulu, HI
7—GARY ALBRIGHT
(8) 343, Billings, MT
8—STEVE WILLIAMS
(6) 265, Norman, OK
9—TAKAO OMORI
(–) 221, Tokyo, Japan
10—JOHNNY SMITH
(–) 235, Manchester, England

EMLL

EMLL Champion:
UNIVERSO 2000
(C) 215, parts unknown

1—RAYO DE JALISCO JR
(1) 270, Guadalajara, Mexico
2—EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(2) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico
3—NEGRO CASAS
(4) 175, Mexico City, Mexico
4—CIEN CARAS
(3) 235, Lagos de Moreno, Mexico
5—BLACK WARRIOR
(5) 221, Mexico City, Mexico
6—EMILIO CHARLES JR
(–) 222, Mexico City, Mexico
7—ULTIMO DRAGON
(8) 175, Mexico City, Mexico
8—FELINO
(10) 165, Mexico City, Mexico
9—ATLANTIS
(9) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico
10—BRAZO DE PLATO
(–) 320, Guadalajara, Mexico

PROMO AZTECA

Promo Azteca Champion:
KONNAN
(C) 237, Mexico City, Mexico

1—PIERROTH JR.
(1) 251, Cuernavaca, Mexico
2—TINIEBLAS JR.
(2) 256, Montclova, Mexico
3—PIRATA MORGAN
(3) 221, Mexico City, Mexico
4—BLACK MAGIC
(5) 238, London, England
5—SILVER KING
(6) 215, Mexico City, Mexico
6—LIZMARK JR.
(7) 249, Acapulco, Mexico
7—JERRY ESTRADA
(8) 239, Montclova, Mexico
8—JUVENTUD GUERRERA
(9) 165, Mexico City, Mexico
9—TARZAN BOY
(10) Monterey, Mexico
10—EL DANDY
(–) 235, Jalisco, Mexico

RATINGS ANALYSIS

Every month, this column will tell fans how we go about rating over 200 wrestlers in 22 different categories. It is a behind-the-scenes look at the most important–and respected–ratings system in the sport.

Have they made a difference? We thought the news for fans of tag team wrestling in the WWF in March was, for the most part, very good. As WCW continued to de-emphasize tag teams, **The New Age Outlaws** continued to improve and get more and more entertaining to watch, **The Disciples of Apocalypse** grew more confident, and **The Headbangers** got on a bit of a roll.

But perhaps most importantly, **Sunny** put an end to the bickering between **Hawk** and **Animal** and reunited them as **LOD 2000**, and **Jim Cornette** put together a new version of **The Midnight Express** that featured a rejuvenated **Bob Holly** and **Bart Gunn**. Those two showed some promise in their initial outings together. In mid-May, however, things weren't looking quite as good for either Sunny or Cornette.

Jesse James

Remember that Hawk and Animal became so frustrated by their inability to recapture the World tag team title in February that they went after each other. Now it looks like they're stuck in another mini-slump. Shortly after WrestleMania, where LOD 2000 won a 15-team battle royal, we considered ranking them number one in our tag team ratings. They were looking *that* good. But they failed to unseat **Billy Gunn** and **Jesse James** as tag team champs at Unforgiven in April, and the best they've been able to do since is beat them by disqualification.

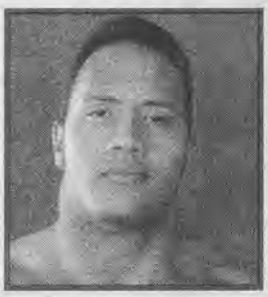
Lately they've been struggling in a feud with the DOA, and you know The New Age Outlaws hope that feud rages on for months and months to come. As a result of their struggles, we've dropped LOD 2000 a few notches in the ratings. Sunny apparently hasn't jump-started the career of the LOD the way everyone expected.

And what of this new Midnight Express? Holly and Gunn have yet to show that they are as good as previous versions of The Midnight Express. Cornette guided them to some impressive wins shortly after their formation, but at press time, they were having a difficult time beating The Headbangers. They're still the NWA tag team champions, but that's only because **Mosh** and **Thrasher** have only been able to beat them in *non-title* matches. Perhaps Cornette has lost a bit of his magic managerial touch, because this Midnight Express can't even be considered for one of the top spots in our tag team ratings. Incidentally, what has the "Louisville Lip" done for the careers of **Dan Severn**, who recently left Cornette's camp, and **Barry Windham**?

Perhaps Jesse James and Billy Gunn really are the dominant team in the WWF.

While we're on the subject of WWF managers, we should discuss **Paul Bearer** as well. To put it bluntly, how much has this deranged man really done for the career of **Kane**, whom he now claims is his son? Kane has consistently been in the WWF ratings since he made his debut in the federation back in October of last year, and he has even made our overall Top 10 a few times, but what has he accomplished lately?

Specifically, what has he done since WrestleMania XIV, when he wrestled his brother, **The Undertaker**, for the first time? Let's see ... he has lost to Undertaker by disqualification in the U.S. ... been pinned by The Undertaker in the U.S. ... been pinned by The Undertaker on the WWF's most recent tour of Europe ... and gotten involved in part two of a feud with **Vader**, a man he dominated in a series of matches this winter.


Rocky Maivia

From our perspective, Kane isn't making a lot of progress. He's dropping in the ratings instead of edging closer to the top. Can't Bearer let Kane put aside his hatred for 'Taker long enough to wrestle for a title? If Kane could beat **Rocky Maivia** for the WWF Intercontinental title ("The Rock" has looked very vulnerable during his entire reign as champion), or, even better, upset **Steve Austin** for the WWF World championship, wouldn't that make 'Taker even angrier? He wants his brother to suffer, not win titles and become a bigger star than he is.

We've said it before and we'll say it again here: We think Kane could make a lot more progress if he dumped Bearer.

That's all for this month! If you have any thoughts on what you see here on this page or anything in our ratings in general, please feel free to drop us a note. Write to: "Ratings Analysis," c/o PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. □

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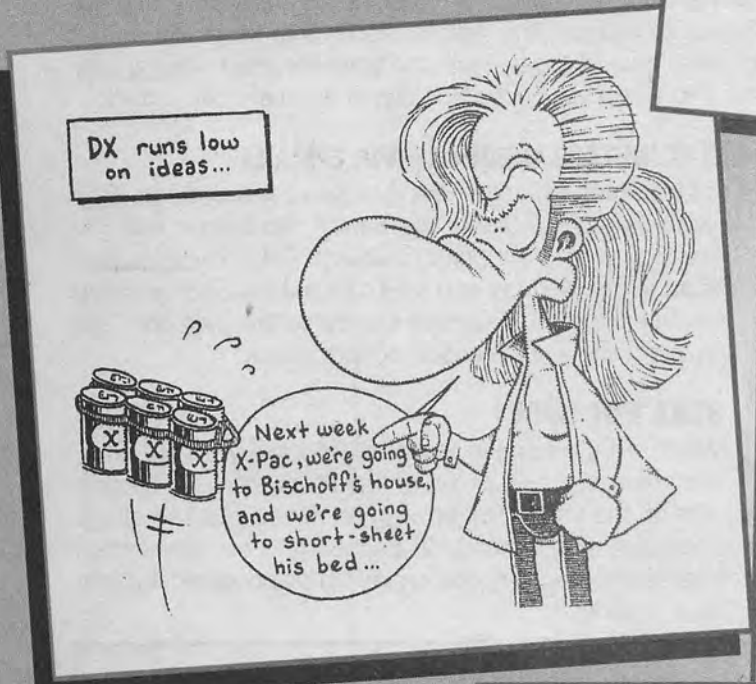

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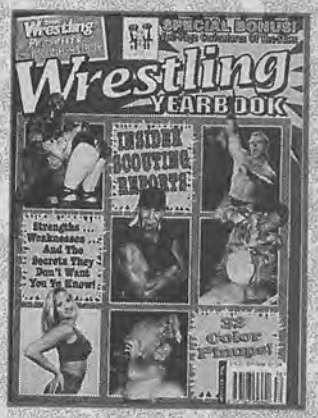

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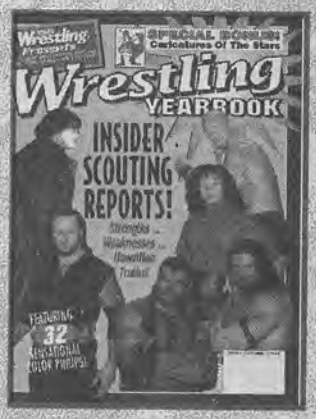

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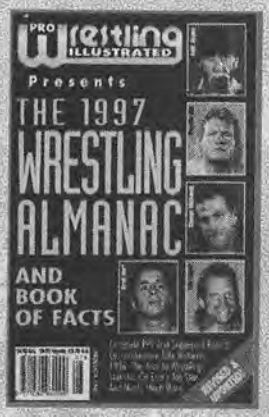

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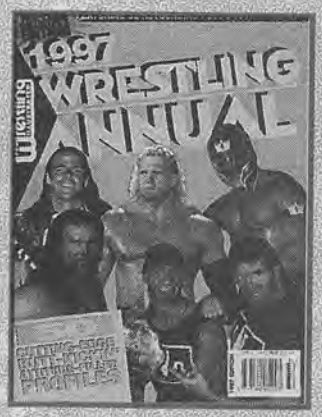

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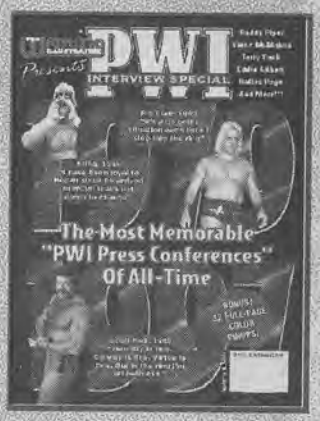

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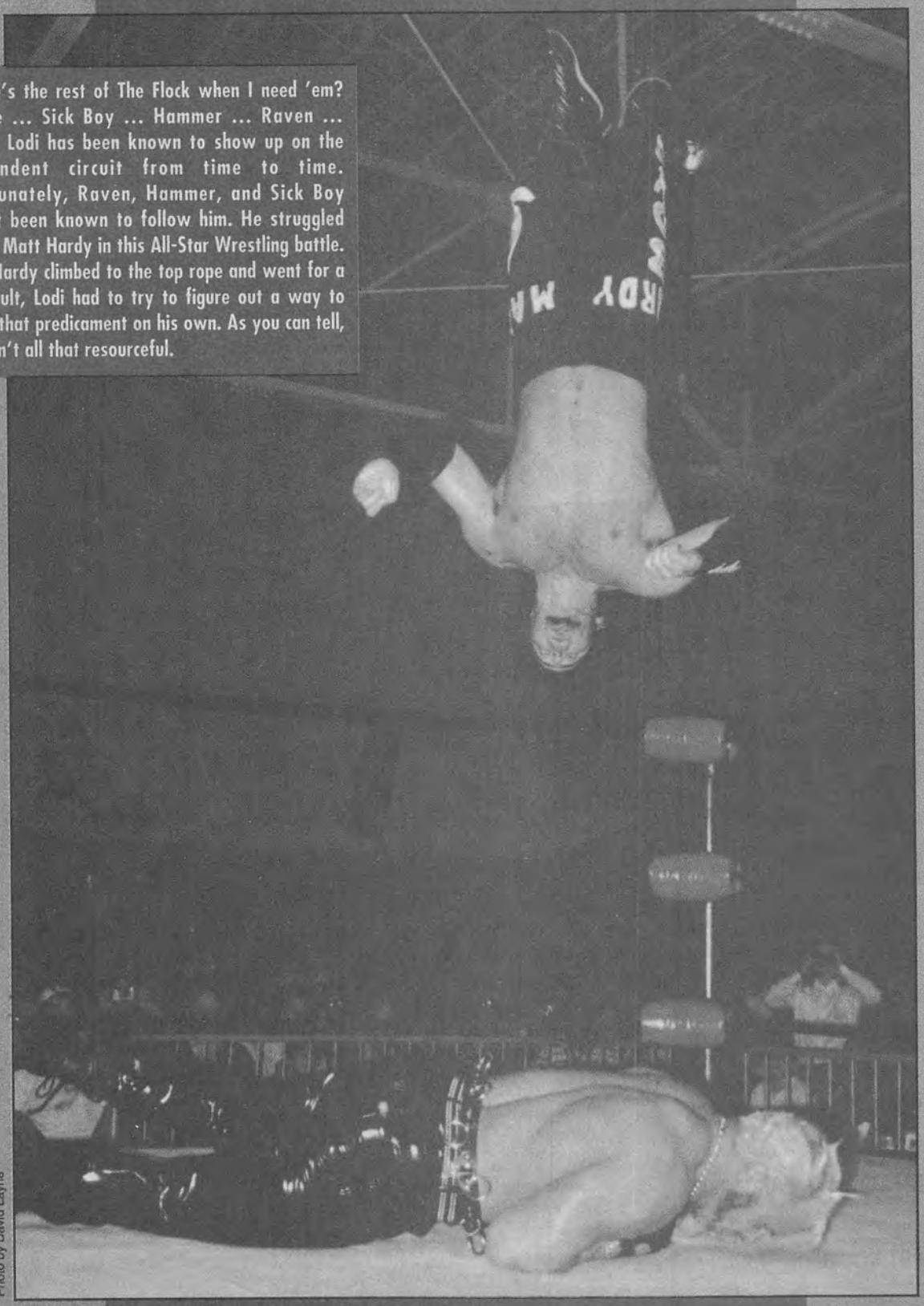

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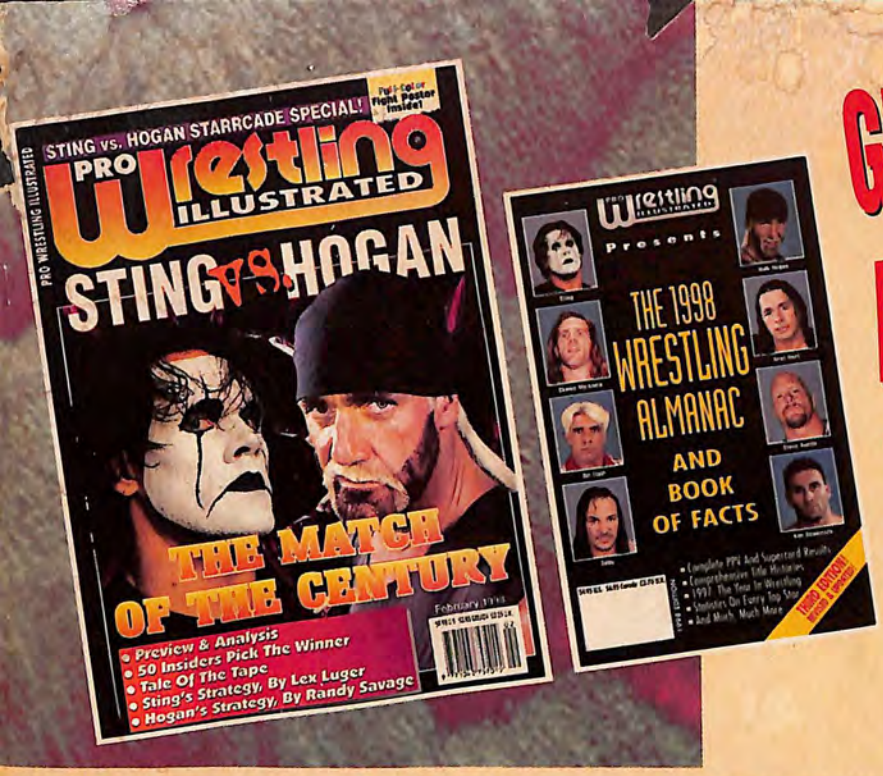
Photo by David Layne



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